Locating the popular-democratic in South African resistance literature in English, 1970-1990.

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Abstract

For my students,
from whom I learn so much

Abstract

As a conjunctural construct located between politics, society and art, the popular-democratic construes the resistance literature of the 1970s and 1980s as being expressive of an entire social movement to end oppression and transform society. Through the construct of the popular-democratic voices that have been marginalised, fragmented, dislocated, excluded or otherwise silenced can be seen in relation to each other and to the sources of oppression.

The introductory chapter addresses the characteristics of the popular-democratic, and the caveats and challenges that attend it. The remaining nine chapters are divided into three sections of three chapters each.

The first section examines repression of different types: structural repression, coercive repression/state violence and cultural repression. An important index of the structural oppression of apartheid is the home, which a range of resistance writers addressed in depth when they dealt with city life and the townships, forced removals, homeless people, rural struggles, migrants and hostels, commuting, the "homelands" and exile.

The coercive apparatus of the state, the security forces, were used against dissidents in the neighbouring states and within the country. The literature addresses the effects of the cross border raids, assassinations, abductions and bombings. The literature that deals with internal repression examines the effects of the mass detentions, restrictions, listings and bannings as well as the impact of the states of emergency, P.W. Botha's "total strategy", and the actions of the death squads.

An examination of the conservative liberal constructions of resistance literature helps to clarify why resistance literature remains inadequately conceptualised ("Soweto poets", "protest literature") although there has been a vibrant and challenging corpus. The way in which the audience of resistance literature is constructed is identified as a key problem. The responses of various resistance writers, in poems, interviews, letters and articles, to conservative liberal prescriptions are contextualised.

The middle section of the argument focuses on the organisations that developed to challenge oppression. Through an examination of the literature that was influenced by the activism and the cultural and philosophical production of Black Consciousness, it is apparent that the movement was continuous with the rest of the struggle for liberation. The satirical poems that challenged both the state and the conservative liberals offer powerful displays of verbal wit.

The struggles of workers are addressed through texts that deal with their plight and call for worker organisations. The trade union COSATU paid close attention to the development of worker culture, which proved to be critical when the state cracked down on the resistance organisations. The production values and effects of very different plays about strikes, *The Long March* and *Township Fever* receive particular attention.

The rise of the United Democratic Front (UDF) is anticipated in literature that celebrates the potential of ordinary South Africans to achieve political significance through unity. Constructed out of substantial ideological pluralism, the UDF arose as an act of political

imagination and organisational strategy. The ideological convergence between the UDF and COSATU on the question of bidding for state power constituted a turning-point in a nation built on the intolerance of difference.

The last section focuses more closely on the productive responses of the culture of resistance to specific aspects of repression, such as the censorship of the media and the arts, the killings of activists, the struggles around education and the keeping of historical records (which enable an interrogation and reconstruction of discursive and interpretive authority).

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

> A literature is being born in the process of social crisis and political change. We should be able to say: we were here; and this is how we were (Gwala, 1989:71).

The following research seeks to conceptualise what is referred to as resistance literature, in the medium of English in South Africa, with attention to the period from the 1970s until the early 1990s.

Although South Africa became a "republic" in 1961, the majority of people had few basic rights. South Africa remained an oppressive society, with the white minority maintaining political and economic control. Black people continued to remain powerless, with no access to economic and political power. In the late 1960s the culture of resistance, that the state had tried to decimate earlier in the decade, began to regenerate. The resistance took the form of local organizations which advanced the struggles of the political organisations that had been banned. In addition to challenging the existing social order, the resistance organisations tried to reconstruct South African society (Zulu in Meer, 1989:20).

The resistance struggle was accompanied by a literature that anticipated a liberated society. Cultural activity in the struggle did more than just accompany or reflect the liberation process. As Cabral contends, during resistance a

> reciprocal relationship between culture and the struggle develops. Culture, as a foundation and a source of inspiration, begins to be influenced by the struggle; and this influence is reflected more or less clearly, in the changing behaviour of social categories and individuals as well as in the development of the struggle itself (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1979:211).

In a highly politicised society many writers and artists would not allow themselves to be alienated from the key political struggles. Resistance literature was seen not just as the expression of individuals or small groups but of an entire social movement to end oppression. Writers and oral composers resisted the repression and censorship of the state and the prescriptions of the conservative liberal critics. Literary activists developed tactics to deal with the silencing. Intervening in various discourses of power they demonstrated that in practice there was little separation between the

> "literary" and "imaginative" on one side and the political and institutional world... on the other (Merod, 1987:9-10).

As awareness of the constructive and constitutive potentials of culture developed many resistance writers acted reflexively, to challenge and transform the social meaning of literature and cultural practice. In the process they redefined the discursive terrain:

> Calling something literary depends on the relationship between literary and extraliterary orders. What is literary in one social system is not necessarily in another. The literary code in South Africa has consistently absorbed functions which are generally the province of other communicative subcodes - journalism, pamphleteering, etc - in less precarious societies (Cornwell, 1980:60).

Cultural development in this period was shaped and advanced by the struggles of students, workers, youth, civic, religious, educational and women's structures.

1.2 The constructs of "the people" and "the community"

> The people have become the social category which is the agent for an immense hope of changing people's lives (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983:18).

Although it is frequently used in political discourse, the construct of "the people" lacks theoretical precision, as is characteristic of discourses that are part of a subaltern bid for power. However, the broad shifts in the meaning of the term "the people" in the resistance discourses of the 1970s and 1980s offer reasonable markers of the path of the struggle for liberation.

The core reference of the term "the people" has been to that sector of the population most oppressed by the apartheid regime, who have been named and misnamed during colonial history, and who have been referred to as "black Africans" in the social sciences. The redundancy in the terminology tells more about the remoteness of the different authorities, than about the nature of the subjected people, who laboured under a range of names which detracted from or imposed identity, rather than affirming it. Owing to the form of naming in common use, the group most oppressed by apartheid will be referred to in this study as Africans, with the recognition that they have stronger claims to the appellation than other South Africans who have some, however remote, elements of unAfrican origin.

Owing to the hegemonic forces of colonialism, apartheid and neocolonialism, the construct "African" has not functioned as a marker of inclusive belonging, locatedness and identity, as

occasioned by the index of geography. Instead, the term has signalled the other of apartheid, consigned to geographic, social and psychological distance, as well as to deprivation and underdevelopment. As with all oppressed groups the abjection and enforced silence of African people is evident in the inadequate and inappropriate names that have been imposed upon them. This has been the experience of an overwhelming majority who, constituting some 74% of the population (and rising), can claim the construct of "the people" quite convincingly. Coloureds comprise 8,7%, Indians 2,5% and whites 14,8% (ANC Women's League, 1993:5). Such proportions challenge the National Party government's balkanization of the country, which was aimed at fragmenting and excluding the largest sector of the population from citizenship of South Africa.

By constituting and ranking "racial groups" in a self-serving hierarchy the dominant minority established exclusive boundaries and secured enormous power. The term "black" has stood as the binary opposite of "white" and signified its other, at least historically. Like other oppressed groups across the world, black people responded by embracing the designation "black" and using it as a cornerstone of their attempts to reconstruct their identity. The regime's second-ranking construct of "Coloured", into which any person could fit, shows up the fictiveness of its own system of racial classification.

In the early 1970s the Black Consciousness Movement engaged in a strategic reconstruction of forces, ignoring the ethnic/geographical and racial divisions of apartheid to designate all people systematically oppressed by the state as "black" (eg., see Biko, 1988:47-53). This affirmed the unity of African people irrespective of linguistic differences, and signalled the inclusion of people the state classified as Coloureds and Indians into a more complex construction of the category of blacks. The Black Consciousness strategy had the effect of challenging the government's construction of division based on difference, and attempted to reverse the fragmentation of the African majority while consolidating its ideological interests. It demonstrated that oppressed people comprised more than 85% of the population and it emphasised the community of interests that consolidated its construction of "the people". The impact of Steve Biko's broadening of the term "black" may be deduced from the subsequent need for commentators in and on South Africa to specify which sense of the word they are using.

While the broader sense of the term "black" affirms the unity of all oppressed South Africans it can mask the fact that while black people as a whole were systematically marginalized and subjugated in social, economic, political and cultural terms, apartheid oppression was not uniform. "Racial" minorities, such as Coloureds and Indians were given more rights than African people, while the African majority was subjected to the most serious underdevelopment. Further, the correspondence between racial stratification and class in South Africa has been extremely high and, owing to apartheid, race has generally been a reliable index of class. The exception has been the petit bourgeoisie, although even then there were marked differentials along racial lines, in respect of proportions, remuneration and other conditions. Within the most oppressed sector some 10 million rural African women (about a quarter of the total population) have experienced the worst conditions. Terms such as "the people" or "black" or even "African" do not on their own do justice to such starkly differentiated race, class and gender realities. Finally, the reactionary or conservative politics of a significant number of people classified as Coloureds or Indians (whether for reasons of

racism, expediency, or fear resulting from National Party propaganda) also undermines any simple construction of black solidarity.

Within the exiled African National Congress (ANC) "the people" has signified all "races" who saw themselves as oppressed by apartheid-capitalism, as well as progressive whites who also believed in majority rule. In the Black Consciousness and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) traditions, progressive whites were not formally counted among the oppressors but neither were they included within the political category of "the people" (Levin, 1991:120-1). Class differences were less well delineated by the resistance organisations (except for the South African Communist Party) until the 1980s.

During the 1980s the United Democratic Front (UDF) followed the construction of "the people" that the African National Congress (ANC) used. The vagueness that surrounded the construct of "the people" had strategic value, enabling the UDF to unite a broad opposition that was critical for the progressive forces to prevail against the state and its forces. The UDF accomplished this partly by declaring its opposition to the system of oppression and by being open to all persons and groups. As oppressed working class people became more organised (particularly through the trade union movement), they, together with the *lumpenproletariat* and peasants (where organisation was possible), gave more substance to class representation in the construction of "the people". It emerges that "the people", as the subjects of resistance, refers at best to the alliances of diverse social elements that challenged apartheid. In the 1970s and 1980s the term did not signify an immanent unity, but represented an imagined construct that contributed to changing attitudes and the balance of power.

The inclusiveness of the construct "the people" produces particular problems: it elides the vast material and ideological differences among people who had little contact with the reality of each others lives. It lends itself to manipulation by petit bourgeois interests by allowing for the glossing over of class differences. African nationalism also had an impact on the construction of "the people" in the ANC, the UDF and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), although in the 1970s and 1980s this was often sacrificed to build broad unity against the power of the divisive regime.

Among the liberation forces tensions around the construct of "the people" were both an index of the effects of apartheid, as well as a reflection of differences in analyses of the nature of oppression and approaches to overcoming the state. The term "the people" covers a range of different conceptions, from the extreme left position of the Azanian Youth (AZANYU), to the PAC position that constructed subjects in terms of their loyalty to Africa and their acceptance of the democratic rule of an African majority, to the BC-influenced National Front. Besides registering tensions between exclusive and inclusive conceptions, the term also registers tensions within organisations such as the UDF, COSATU and the ANC. Evolving constructions of "the people" (eg., the increasing attention to women's rights, and the gradual eclipse of class late in the 1980s) reflect the trajectory and the casualties, as well as the contradictions, of the liberation struggle.

In addition to the strategic reasons for the broad construction of "the people" there were philosophical reasons. Progressive sectors of the liberation movement challenged the dominant mechanisms of segmentation, rejecting the view that a person is essentially part of

one and only one discrete racial, ethnic or cultural group (as the National Party's schema insisted). In the revolutionary climate a combination of approaches to identity construction (which are recognisably materialist, poststructuralist and postcolonialist) was on the ascendent: identity began to be seen not as a fixed entity but as a process of composition and recomposition, ie., subject to the forces of politics, language, religious culture and commerce (Amselle, cited by Miller, 1990:35).

A subset of the construct "the people", the term "commmunity" refers to a smaller group with more specific objectives. "Community" does not signify a homogeneous entity but allows for differentiation. The construct "seems never to be used negatively" (Williams, 1983:76), not even in South Africa where the National Party government distorted the term to sustain sectarianism (Thornton and Ramphele, in Boonzaier and Sharp, 1988:29-30). In the resistance discourses the term "community" has stood in opposition to the military, political, economic and cultural hegemonies that characterised South African society, and the legal and institutional exclusions that secured the domination and profit of a minority (Merod, 1987:134). The term community conditions the concept of culture in that its open-endedness suggests that culture cannot be derived from a single determining social process, such as race. Therefore, despite the policies of deliberate exclusion, repression and underdevelopment, the concept "community" marks a space were change begins to emerge. Community is linked to the indigenous construct of *ubuntu*, which signifies a communal spirit. While the romanticisation of the construct of community made for some gains on the part of liberation organisations, the process of reconstruction has been better served by determining how, as Merod argued, the term "community" could be used constructively rather than nostalgically (1987:97). The notion of community has also offered scope for constructions of the "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983:14-16), which are integral to the development of a complex postcolonial society.

1.3 Culture

> the liberation struggle is not simply cultural fact: it is a *cultural factor*, a process giving new forms and content to culture (Cabral in Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1979:211).

Raymond Williams has argued that "[c]ulture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (1983:87). In Williams' work, as well as in the work of a range of theorists such as Antonio Gramsci, Richard Hoggart, Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, Pierre Bourdieu, John B. Thompson and Stuart Hall, culture is considered an important site of

domination and resistance. This is pertinent in a country where political and other avenues were closed off to most of the population. The dominant forces used economic, political, judicial and military systems to maintain control. However, economic and political hegemony could not be secured without cultural control, because

> culture is the carrier of a people's values. And the values a people hold - as the basis of their self-identity as a people - is the basis of how they look at themselves collectively and individually in relationship to the universe (Ngugi, 1985:18).

Some of the battles occured at a fundamental level around ideology and resources. As in many other societies, emphasis upon the artistic value of literature grew more pronounced among conservative intellectuals as the oppressed majority became more educated (Bourdieu, 1984; Carey, 1992). It appears that, more than their mode of expression, it was the rising political and economic power of the oppressed that provoked conservative intellectual reactions. Literature has been especially subject to the ideological operations of the different dominant fractions (eg., the state, and the conservative English liberals) as they used culture to entrench their power.

Culture enabled the envisioning, development and communication of a new political imaginary integral to advancing the struggle and to reconstruction. Owing to the nature of the repression, traces of contestation were often manifest only in the cultural sphere, and even then "politicised" cultural expression was often suppressed by the state. It was also discouraged by conservative academics who sought to preserve their domain. Nevertheless, in societies struggling to free themselves from foreign or minority domination, culture has offered a vital arena of critical expression, which was easily adapted to serve the resistance.

Williams has also made the assertion that "[c]ulture is ordinary" (Gray 1993:5), and it is instructive that Williams sustained this position throughout his study of culture in western society. This is a refreshing and challenging attitude, and Williams has been well placed to make it.[1] The notion that culture is ordinary must be read against the special needs of communities experiencing oppression. It is evident that the struggle, which seeks to produce a fundamentally different set of relations between people, "cannot leave intact either the form or the content of people's culture" (Fanon, 1963:246). From the recognition that the arts are expressive not only of the easy lives of the privileged, but that they also issue from the difficult lives of the majority of people, culture may be understood as the way in which people (or a historically-determined group of people) reproduce, create and develop their material existence (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983:12).

Through cultural assertion and production the social, political and institutional framework, which authorizes and sustains literature and literary practice has been challenged. The combination of the imaginative propensities and the communicative function of literature has been particularly important for the development of the political imaginary of resistance and reconstruction. Many resistance writers were able to draw upon indigenous frames of reference: the focus on literature as a collective undertaking shows the impact of the oral tradition, as does the construction of the role of the oral performer, which challenges the petit bourgeois conception of the individualist writer.

1.4 The concepts "popular" and "democratic"

The widespread though largely untheorised implication that particular cultural practices and expressions are popular in the democratic sense in South Africa is apparent in constructs such as "culture of the oppressed", "culture of resistance", "culture of liberation", "alternative culture", "national-popular culture", "subaltern culture" and "popular memory". The word "popular", according to Raymond Williams, "was originally a legal and political term" from the Latin *popularis*, which meant "belonging to the people" (1983:238). Williams explains that the construct was "seen from the point of view of the people rather than from those seeking favour or power over them" (1983:238). Other pertinent meanings suggested by Williams are the more modern sense of "well-liked by many people" and the sense of "made by people for themselves" (1983:238). The last meaning reflects the nineteenth century socialist conception of the popular, which suggests the self-reliant and generative qualities that have been critical to the liberation struggle:

> The idea of people/popular goes back to the idea of men and women united, linked by objective situations and the consciousness of living together, capable of developing solutions for their survival and liberation (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983:18).

Brecht's sense of the popular speaks to the situation in South Africa by focusing more thoroughly upon the subjects of the popular:

> people in their broadest masses, oppressed by minorities, in short "the people themselves", the mass who produce, who for so long were the object of politics and who must now become the subject (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983:18).

This is reinforced by Mattelart's position that "the operative definition of popular culture, is that of a culture produced from below" (1983:19).

Time is of particular significance in this conception of the popular: Fiske has pointed out that popular culture "is eminently in the present and can be defined as a culture of daily life" (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983:26). This is patently in contrast to the conservative fetish of selected versions of the past.

In this study the term "democratic" is used to qualify the meaning of the construct of the popular, to indicate its specificity, and the values that inform its orientation. Democracy has been a powerful construct in the resistance to minority domination, particularly in the 1980s when, across the country, there was an unprecedented development of strategic alliances between a variety of resistance structures with a unitary, democratic state and full franchise as the common objectives. Cabral elaborates the popular and democratic character of the struggle for liberation:

> the struggle requires the exercise of democracy, criticism and self-criticism, growing participation by the people in running their own lives, literacy, the

> creation of schools and health services, leadership training for persons with rural and urban laboring backgrounds, and many other developments which impel people to set forth upon the road of cultural progress (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1979:211).

Democracy proved to be one of the most threatening ideas to the security of the minority regime, rather than the Communism or Marxism which the National Party government vilified. Part of the political imaginary of the resistance movements, the term democracy refers both to an ideal state and to an informing process (as Cabral's argument indicates). The political value attached to the construct increased both despite and as a result of the repressiveness of the state. The contention of the state and other forces (such as big business, homeland leaders and conservative liberals) that differences between South Africans ruled out a democratic political dispensation in a unitary state was challenged by the majority of South Africans, and eventually supported by most of the international community.

1.5 Challenges and caveats attending the popular

A range of complexities and ambiguities accompany any construction of the popular. The popular has a variety of partly overlapping, partly incompatible meanings, which is the consequence of being a heavily ideological term (Barber, 1987:6). Barber (1987), Bourdieu (1993) and Sole (1994) have pointed out that the existing literature on the popular arts is diffuse and often unreflective about the theoretical problems that have to be addressed.

Attempts to theorise the popular-democratic tend to be hampered by the absence of explicit statements regarding what the popular-democratic might mean, even in the work of intellectuals who use it quite centrally. Two well-known texts illustrate the issue: in *Popular Struggles for Democracy in Africa* (1987) edited by Peter Anyang Nyong'o and *Popular Struggles in South Africa* (1988) edited by William Cobbett and Robin Cohen, none of the editors explains his conception of the popular. All assume that their notions (which, coincidentally, are quite close to the sense that the term has in this study) are well established. However, this is not the case. While there are some convergences in intellectual discourse this issue is given little explicit attention, except in the work of Barber (1987).

More often the popular refers to an amorphous "residual category, its borders defined only by juxtaposition with the clearly demarcated traditional and elite categories" (Barber, 1987:9). However, this does offer possibilities:

> this very flexibility and elusiveness is a potential strength, containing within it elements from which a theory of popular arts might be constructed. The very weaknesses and evasions of the definition of *popular* in the existing literature contain the promise of insights (Barber, 1987:6).

This is supported by the way in which many South African resistance writers have worked with the construct (as will be examined in the rest of this study).

The popular has been susceptible to political manouevres. As political orientations have waxed and waned, so has the application of the popular. Brecht argued that distortions of the popular were the result of struggles over power:

> The history of all lies dissimulated under the term "popular" is a long and complex history of social struggles (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983:18).

There are various forms of reductionism. The essentialist and reactionary formations that have divided and controlled captive societies tended to depotentiate, miniaturize and freeze cultural forms.

> Popular culture is not a museum culture cultivating the nostalgia of a past more radiant than the present which sparkles all the more that one is powerless in the present (Mattelart, 1983:25).

This ties in with Cabral's warnings regarding the gesture of a "return to the sources" by *comprador* elites, who use commodified and partial versions of the past to preserve and celebrate their power, and to gloss over their failure to make any effective contribution to the popular struggles for national liberation (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983:207).[2]

There is also the sense of the popular as naive: in this scheme art is seen to be passive, vacuous or politically illiterate, working against the interests of its producers as it tolerates and reinforces the values of the dominant. But Barber cautions against summary dismissal pointing out that the issue can be quite complex:

> we should not decide too hastily that works which appear conservative are completely and impenetrably so. They may conceal criticisms of, or reservations about, the status quo which people have good reasons not to express openly (1987:7).

The spontaneous expression of people who have not been conscientised (Barber, 1987:7) could simply be an index of a particular level of development in a highly oppressed society.

The superficial similarities between the construct of the popular and the notion of "Volk" is curious but misleading, because of their ideological divergence. While "Volk" was crafted as an ethno-nationalist label to construct the homogeneity, separateness and distinction of the Afrikaner minority (to legitimate its monopolisation of power and resources), the popular-democratic ideology has been used to unite people who have been sundered and dispossessed

by the machinations of apartheid and capitalism. Millions of South Africans have drawn on the one resource they did have, their substantive numerical proportion, to "tell freedom".

The popular-democratic is substantively different from the established constructs of "high" culture and "mass" culture. "Mass culture" is often misleadingly conflated with "popular culture", usually by proponents of high culture who fail to distinguish between the two. However, popular-democratic culture cannot be conflated with mass culture (which is informed by the operation of market forces). The oxymoronic term "mass popular" takes its reference from market-oriented genres, which were developed to exploit particular markets/audiences. In the scheme of "mass popular" people are reduced to being objects:

> The mass... is a metaphor for the unknowable and indivisible. We cannot see the mass. Crowds can be seen; but the mass is the crowd in its metaphysical aspect - the sum of all possible crowds - and that can take on conceptual form only as metaphor. The metaphor of the mass serves the purposes of individual self-assertion because it turns other people into a conglomerate. It denies them the individuality which we ascribe to ourselves and to people we know (Carey, 1992:21).

The key difference between the democratically popular construction of culture and the notion of mass/commercially popular relates to the subject position of the audience: in the former the audience plays an active part in the creative processes while in the latter they are the consumers of a product who participate in a commercial transaction. There is slippage from a sense of people as active participants in popular culture to a sense of a passive "silent majority" in the construct of "mass culture". Brecht is dismissive of the notion of "mass culture" as "a synonym for the lack of history, the static, without evolution" (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983:18). The commodification of cultural production and the sensationalism which tends to characterise mass culture are strategies of disempowerment:

> The "mass" is, of course, a fiction. Its function, as a linguistic device, is to eliminate the human status of the majority of people (Carey,1992:21).

The use of the term "masses" as a device of exclusion has been most evident in references to "public opinion". Far from being representative of the majority of South Africans such a construct has tended to represent the powerful elites who were able to register their views in a highly repressive society. Elite groups have been able to articulate their positions either through the government or the media they controlled. Like the government, the two large media blocs tended to reproduce the ideology of political or cultural elites, out of all proportion to their numbers and their constituencies. This is evident in the anomalous concepts that were used in dominant or untheorised representations, namely, "mainstream media" and its derivative, "alternative media".

Equally inadequately theorised are assumptions regarding the representivity of the English language in South Africa. The colonially-inscribed power of English, as well as the attempts by the apartheid state to impose Afrikaans, tend to obscure its position as a minority language in South Africa. This has important implications for the limits of this study, which is also

subject to the structures of publishing, language policies, information-collection and censorship.

The popular has been used quite opportunistically by a range of political groups on the left and the right, as the phenomenon of populism indicates. Populism causes much confusion through its strategic elision of the concepts of mass popular and democratically popular. Populism tends to be identified with a single charismatic leader (or an alliance of leaders). There is a pronounced tendency to elevate certain persons to speak for all. The discipline of mandates and accountability that the progressive trade union movement instituted offered the most effective control over the dilution of democratic processes inherent in populism. It is this genre of the popular that Mattelart has in mind when he cautions that the ritualised "invocation of the popular can hide, in fact, the absence of concrete people" (1983:18). However, the caution applies to all genres of the popular.

Quite different from populism is the challenge of vanguardist structures, which can play a significant role in highly repressive systems. The vanguardist roles of politically committed writers and organisations, who tried to speak in the name of oppressed people to affirm their rights (when nobody with institutional power chose to do so), was critical to the emergence of an assertive and open society. The following definition of the popular by Brecht unwittingly clarifies the shortcomings of vanguardism:

> The popular is that which is understood by the broad masses: that which grasps and enriches their form of expression, incorporating and asserting their point of view; that which is representative of the most progressive sector of the people, which can thus lead it while remaining comprehensible to other sectors of the people (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983:18).

This represents a perspective that is characteristic of activists operating under conditions of repression: the popular is defined not in terms of its origins but in terms of the interests it serves. Popular art, in this view, is art which furthers the cause of oppressed people by acting on their behalf. Despite its objectives, this is still a form of patronage. Popular activity, in the democratic sense, is part of a broad movement aimed not just at bringing communication to ordinary people, but at liberating their voices (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983:22). While the vanguardist position has the virtue of viewing cultural expression as being consequential, it is a problem to the extent that it tends to sacrifice production, ie., the means, for the ends. While such an approach may be justified under conditions of oppression, it tends to exacerbate rather than resolve the problems of development, at least in the short term - assuming that the calculations on which it is based result in effective social transformation.[3] The problems of vanguardism serve as challenges to deepen the democratic process.

V.N. Volosinov's statement that a word "is determined by *whose* word it is and for *whom* it is meant" (1973:86) offers an important means of checking the validity of any construction of the popular. This is apparent in the way Volosinov's statement resonates in the work of postcolonial writers like Wole Soyinka (1975), Karin Barber (1987), Edward Said (1993), Gayatri Spivak (1990) and Trinh Minh-ha (1989), all of whom draw directly upon it in ways that are productive for the construction of the popular-democratic, such as Barber's generative formulation:

> We need to ask by whom and by what means, in what circumstances, under what constraints, in whose interests, and in accordance with what conventions, these arts are produced (1987:5).

1.6 The construct of the popular-democratic

That which is popular, in a democratic sense, is always in the making and is always up for contestation. Because the popular-democratic is constituted through the process of struggle, exploratory working definitions are indicated. As Mattelart recognises, popular space

> is not a space given a priori... a constitutive definition of the popular is itself at stake in the struggle (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983:18).

It emerges that the acts of constituting and defining are less focused on crystallizing meaning, and more attentive to the development of meanings that have usually been latent in the study of culture.

The basis of the construct "popular-democratic literature" has to do with the democratic aspect of the national struggle against minority oppression. The struggle had a powerful impact on the resistance literature of the 1970s and 1980s. The literature inserted itself into public discourse as part of the counter-hegemonic process. As a result, the term "popular-democratic literature" refers to resistance literature which was not just reactive but issued from the desire of people for social, political and economic justice through a representative dispensation in a unitary democracy.

Through the literature it emerges that the popular-democratic may be characterised as a critical and constructive approach that invests in progress in human development. Writers and other composers in this scheme see cultural growth as an essential part of development. Popular-democratic literature tends to focus on the social meaning of experience. It reinserts "literary" texts into cultural practices, addressing the questions of how literature, theory and criticism could become socially productive. Critics such as Bakhtin, Brecht, Williams, and Bourdieu have variously pointed out that culture is the lived experience of all people. Bakhtin, then Bourdieu, and later Fiske and Brett have maintained that there are no categorical boundaries between art and life. With a few exceptions, most of the research into the resistance literature of the 1970s and 1980s has tended to neglect this. This is limiting because an important characteristic of the literature is its connectedness to everyday experience.

Popular-democratic literature has been important in the political struggle, the more so as other spaces were marked off or closed off. Popular-democratic literature tends to track the political and cultural development of people who reject having to be the object of politics and who insist on their right to become empowered subjects. The links with the political project of liberation are most evident where literary works create new speaking places, which enable people to speak to, for and of each other. Popular-democratic literature constructs spaces where voices that have been marginalised, fragmented, dislocated, excluded and otherwise silenced can be seen in relation to each other. This does have overtones of redress, for in South Africa such voices tend to represent an overwhelming majority.

It is the everyday activities of poor and oppressed people that offer the most effective sites of political engagement, for "[t]he real is always a site of contestation" (Ashcroft in Tiffin and Lawson, 1994:34). It follows that the popular-democratic is a "part of the everyday, not distanced from it" (Fiske, 1992:154), for it "poses everyday life as a political problem" (Fiske in Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983:26). Given that conditions of oppression have a direct bearing on the materiality of cultural expression, within this scheme "distantiation is an unattainable luxury" (Fiske, 1992:155). Therefore, the focus on the everyday tends to counter the social abstraction (ie., alienation) produced by colonialism, neocolonialism, industrialization and apartheid. Celebrating everyday experience affirms the ordinary, in stark contrast to the fetishization of "art" and "commodities" that tends to characterise high and mass culture respectively. In the postcolonial, neocolonized world popular-democratic literature addresses the challenges of citizens of the majority world (or "Third World"). It constitutes integrative approaches that challenge the "universalism" of neocolonial culture through emancipatory theories and practices. Functioning as part of a politics of knowledge in which social justice for all citizens is the objective, a consistent goal of popular-democratic literature has involved making critical opposition part of the general opposition.

While popular-democratic culture tends to focus on local development, from which it emerges and takes its bearings, it also has global resonance, as indicated by the responses of the United Nations, the non-aligned movement, the African bloc and the Commonwealth. As Brett contends,

> Paradoxically, the more intensely these images represent a local reality and a local experience, the more global they seem to become (1986:8).

Popular-democratic literature is located in the conjuncture between politics and art and participates in the dialectic between them (Ndebele, 1988:213). Given the context in which popular-democratic literature arises it necessarily has to participate, as Mattelart argues, in an "unequal, but dialectical, exchange with the dominant cultural grid with its norms, values, models and signs connected to ruling power" (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983:17). This is most evident in the satirical poetry and in the poetry dealing with the deaths in detention.

Owing to the precarious political situation, expressions of popular-democratic culture tend to be makeshift and contingent, work in progress, necessarily provisional, experimental and hybrid. But Mattelart asserts that this does not imply that the popular-democratic is a flaccid, catch-all category:

> Admitting that the space of popular concepts and practices is a space under construction and thus open to debate does not mean that it is an empty bottle into which everyone pours their own meaning (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983:24).

Unlike the construct of mass popular the popular-democratic does not homogenise the oppressed, but renders the complex community of interests. By relating cultural practices to other forms of social and political activity, and by challenging the cultural apparatuses themselves, such works tend to challenge the ruling concepts of literature as fetishes of class or subculture. In turn, popular-democratic literature does not seek to be objective, neutral, trans-historical or trans-geographic, for it takes its bearings from its temporal and spatial location as well as from the history of repression and marginalisation of the majority.

Recognising the significance of power as the basis of all social practice, the popular-democratic represents a counterhegemonic project. Collective forms of organisation are used to change established structures. Just as literature has functioned on behalf of the dominant to establish hegemony, many resistance writers/composers conscripted it into the service of the oppressed. Activist writers and composers used their texts strategically to intervene in various discourses of power and to exert pressure that was otherwise impossible given the conditions of repression. Writers such as Serote (1972; 1978; 1982b), Van Wyk (1979), Cronin (1983; 1985; 1988), Malange (1989) and Ndebele (1983; 1988; 1991) have attempted to constitute, enunciate and conceptualize oppressed voices in fiercely guarded cultural arenas.

Writers and composers of popular-democratic literature have been alert to the fact that literature represents the most complex embodiment of persuasive language, even as they recognised that the relationship of literature to politics is highly mediated. They used their hard-won public voices to challenge the dominant political and cultural discourses, opening up new possibilities in literary form and language as they reconceptualised the relationships between power, communication and art.

> In South Africa the role of language as used by the ruling classes is to maintain and reproduce the existing order of apartheid and exploitation. It is also in and through language that the existing order is contested (Meintjies, 1989:25).

Like other resistance writers, Ndebele responds to this as a challenge, seizing the space that literary discourse offers and challenging its boundaries and assumptions (1991). Many resistance writers and composers recognised that while language is an art medium, it has a more widespread function as a communication matrix:

> the centrality of language - of shared systems of communication - to human society underpins the centrality of language to culture, self-definition, consciousness and to the definition of reality itself (Meintjies, 1989:16).

As activists most of the resistance writers have shared a faith in the instrumentality of the word. The popular-democratic draws upon both functions of language, redressing the

imbalance and isolation of the artistic significance of language that has occurred in formalist constructions of literature.

Given the challenges and obstacles that they faced, the volume, range and depth of the work produced by resistance writers in the 1970s and 1980s is surprising and largely unacknowledged as a corpus. The construct of the popular-democratic helps make sense of the volume, range, depth and character of this material, and to begin a systematic account. Some of the most powerful expressions of the popular-democratic are in the medium of poetry, oral and written:

> In the last decade... poetry has been marching in the front ranks of the mass struggles that have rolled through our land (Cronin, *Weekly Mail*, 13.3.87:19).

Resistance drama is also significant, as are some short stories, and a few examples of each have been addressed. This is not to neglect the novel, for the work of writers like Miriam Tlali and Mandla Langa are important, but this form necessitates further study, as do the genres of music, photography, film, posters, cartoons, paintings and dance.

Though the popular-democratic has been an important strand of cultural expression in the 1970s and 1980s, much of the theorisation is nascent. In its constitution there are more questions and incomplete critical forays than conclusions. However, there can be no insistence on closure, because "[n]o one reads from a neutral or final position" (Clifford and Marcus, 1986:18), but also because the popular-democratic project was largely interrupted by F.W. de Klerk's pre-emptive political manoeuvres in February 1990.

Notes

1. Such an position, attendant upon decades of research, is patently not an attempt to trivialize the concept, but rather to provide some balance to the intellectual predilection for fetishizing culture.

2. Cabral adds that

> "return to the sources" is historically important *only* if it involves both a genuine commitment to the fight for independence and a total, definitive identification with the aspirations of the masses (1983:207).

3. The problems of "protest literature" have some roots in such an approach.

Chapter Two: Home and dislocation: resistance writers address structural oppression

2.1 Introduction

> [S]tructural violence assaults the majority of people living in South Africa as harshly as any physical confrontation (Wilson and Ramphele, 1989:4).

> The arts are not merely the expression of the easy life of the affluent, they also reflect the hard lives of the ordinary people (Freire, 1985:78).

This chapter examines how resistance writers addressed structural oppression. This is a vast subject, owing to the apartheid policies on land, governance, health, employment, racial classification, education and so on. As the home is an important index of location and as a range of resistance writers made the home and dislocation the subject of their activism, this will be used as the basis for examining structural oppression.

The notion of home is a key construct in society, rendering significant indices of location, identity, social and psychological coherence. The black home in South Africa has been vulnerable to the structural violence of the state. There have been problems with the provision of housing for most of the century. Owing to grand apartheid no houses were built between 1972 and 1981. As a result, by "the end of 1987 the total housing shortage in the country amounted to between 700 000 and 1 400 000 units" (Cooper, 1988:198). However, since the major research projects done under apartheid were subject to the record-keeping matrices of the state, these figures could be inaccurate by some millions.

Many African families, urban or rural, have experienced severe problems with accommodation. In the mid-1980s a National Building Research Institute report found that 7.4 million black township residents lived in 466 000 "relatively small" housing units, signifying an average of some 16 persons per dwelling (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:126). In addition, residents endured shoddy building construction and the absence of adequate roads and services, such as refuse collection, electricity, and water. The availability and quality of water has been a problem for more than half of all African households (*The National Household Survey of Health Inequalities in South Africa*, abbreviated to *NHS*, 1995:17). This has necessitated long journeys to fetch water. Traditionally the task of women, the increasingly-distant search for water (and wood) has consumed much of their time and energy, as Oswald Mtshali's poem about migrant workers, "*Amagoduka* at Glencoe Station" (1972:67-70), suggests:

> hollow-cheeked maidens
> heaving drums of brackish water
> from a far away fountain.

The housing crisis has been compounded by the cumulative effects of poverty and repression. More than half of all of African households (55%) reported difficulty feeding themselves (*NHS*, 1995:20), while 72% have incomes that are below the minimum living level (1995:18). The effects of poverty on physical and mental health has been enormous and is one of the major reasons for the social breakdown that has occurred over the decades: "apartheid undermined people's self-confidence and the belief that they can control the events that shape their lives" (1995:91). This is represented in a range of poems, including most of the poems in Sipho Sepamla's anthology *The Blues is You in Me* (1976), and in James Matthews' poem "I've been there before" (1974:38), which addresses the suffering of people in Athlone, his home township:

> i was born...
> watered with neglect...
> a stunted frame and wasteland mind.

The grossly unequal distribution of resources that has characterised South African society is the major determinant of poverty. A significant measure of inequality is the difference in income:

> According to internationally accepted measurements, South Africa has "the unenviable distinction of having the most unequal distribution of income for any economy for which data is currently available". While the living standards of South African whites are equal to any in the first world, half of all African households in the country live below the "least generously drawn poverty line" (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:126).

It is ironic that while South Africa produces enough food for each person twice over, the majority of its people have been malnourished. As a result, poverty in South Africa is a profoundly political issue.

Of all age groups, children have fared the worst: two out of three African children have (66%) grown up in overcrowded households (*NHS* 1995:27), while 70% of all African children have lived in destitution in the rural areas, ie., in the former "homelands" and on white-owned farms (1995:27). A line from Mongane Wally Serote's early poem "No Baby Must Weep" bears witness to the profound suffering of most African children: "i am the child of an hour that assaults me" (1975:84). The tension between the extract and the resolve of the title captures the responses of millions of children and youth in the 1970s and 1980s when *NHS*-type research was not possible and only ethnographic sketches could be made.

2.2 Townships

> Townships were constructed to facilitate direct forms of social control. Most urban townships had single access roads and entrances, and were surrounded by "buffer zones". Police stations were located at township entrances and residents were subject to curfews and dawn raids (Boraine in Moss and Obery, 1989:107).

There are many poems that refer to the townships of Imbali, Lamontville, Athlone, Langa, KwaNobuhle, Alexandra and Sharpeville. Wally Serote writes about Alexandra, Sipho Sepamla about Soweto, Mafika Gwala focuses on his home township of Mpumalanga, the activist Dikobe wa Mogale (also known as Anthony Duke Martins) portrays Sobantu and Alexandra, and Deelah Khan depicts developments in Mitchell's Plain. The occasional contributors of poetry to the culture or correspondence columns of media like *Natal Witness Echo*, *New Nation*, *South*, *Grassroots*, *Tribute* and *New African* have also addressed the day-to-day struggles of the urban oppressed. Writing about politically committed poetry in the 1960s and 1970s, Jacques Alvarez-Pereyre argues that the

> importance accorded to the portrayal of everyday life [is] a sign of the hold that this factor has on virtually everyone... it occupies a very large place in the life and work of the poets writing at the moment (1984:251).

One of the earliest and most striking poems in the period under examination is Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali's "Nightfall in Soweto" (1972:42-3), which appeared in his first collection *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*. The persona signifies both the solitary sufferer of romantic poetry and the symbolic representative of the suffering of an entire community:

> I am the victim.
> I am slaughtered
> every night in the streets.
> I am cornered by the fear
> gnawing at my timid heart;
> in my helplessness I languish.

Conscious of his location between English "high culture" and the African oral tradition, Mtshali uses the title of the collection to affirm the indigenous tradition. Obliged to write in English, and to use the available public medium of the poetry anthology, the poet nevertheless struggles to articulate the voices of a systematically marginalized majority. However, "Nightfall in Soweto" does not engage in more than a representation of the fear and horror experienced by an unassertive person who sees himself only as a victim. Many other poems written in this period attempted to go further than witnessing suffering, as is clear from the work of Mongane Wally Serote and Sipho Sepamla.

South African townships only begin to make sense, and then strictly in apartheid terms, in relation to the cities behind which they lie. The complex material relations between white Johannesburg and its dormitory black townships are alluded to in Serote's "City

Johannesburg" (1972:13), where the speaker is a menial worker who commutes between his underdeveloped township and the most powerful city on the continent. The speaker's attitude of suppressed defiance may be understood from the deduction that after a few decades, the average township family has settled the cost of its two-roomed house several times over in rent. Given the inadequate services and utilities that townships received, the rentals that were collected effectively subsidised the rentals and services of the city centre. Yet South African city centres have long been monopolised, through laws of race and property, by white interests. Therefore, instead of being dependent upon the "white" city, the harried workers have subsidised the apartheid cities, not just through their cheap labour but also through their council house rentals.

Poor people tend to be invisible and inaudible, excluded by law, drowned out by the mass media and marginalized by various elites. A catalogue of neglect and dispossession is articulated in Sipho Sepamla's poem "Soweto" (1984:109-110). Sepamla depicts the wretched ghettoes that were constructed by the apartheid state out of a fiction of ethnic difference based on language or dialect. The speaker addresses a personification of the brutal yet beloved township:

> you were born an afterthought
> on the by-paths of highways
> and have lived as a foster child
> whose wayward ways have broken hearts...
> on your neck was placed a yoke of laws
> which has tried to strangle your life...
> I love you Soweto...
> I have hated the stench of your blood

The word "location" that the National Party government once favoured to denote Black residential areas actually suggested the opposite: various housing policies resulted in residents developing an acute sense of impermanence, abstraction and alienation. The ambivalence of the persona renders the efforts of victims to develop a sense of home beyond the dislocating constructions, practices and legislation of apartheid. As the persona suggests, almost reflexively, the spirit that survived did so despite the harshness, squalor and despair. The words and actions that affirm belonging show a desperate opposition to the government's policies of enforced alienation, either to the fictive "homelands", or beyond (as dissidents were forced into exile).

A focus on the poetry of one township in the 1970s and 1980s clarifies the issues of location that many writers were addressing. Alexandra, which lies to the north of Johannesburg, is a slum township that has withstood the attempts of apartheid's planners to demolish it. Many poets have written about the "black spots", the pockets of black-occupied land in zones demarcated as "white". There is the Cape Town poet James Matthews' "Alexandra" (1974:51), Mafika Gwala's "Exit Alexandra - 23:5:74" (1982:27-8), Wally Serote's batch, which includes "Amen! Alexandra"(1982:46) and "Another Alexandra" (1982:47-49), and Dikobe wa Mogale's second collection, which begins with the poem "alexandra township" (1992:1). In Wa Mogale's first collection, *baptism of fire*, the poem "alexandra" (1984:13) contrasts the squalor and degradation of the ghetto to Johannesburg, and in particular to the

plush white suburb of Sandton that adjoins it:

> overcrowded
> and overflowing
> like a fallen dustbin...
>
> alexandra
> the big toilet
> stuck unceremoniously
> like a black anus
> between the white buttocks
> of johannesburg city
> alexandra
> mother and home

The poem is provocative, using shock effects to contest at least two ideological fronts. There is the scatological challenge to the polite, antiseptic and middle-class symbolic order of English South African poetry. A more significant eschatological challenge is issued through the use of sexual/anal imagery. The "transgression" challenges the ideology of apartheid, which rests on the Calvinistic fetish of the body (which has been manifested, contradictorily, as the alienation of the body). Drawing upon the eschatological language that the state invoked both to characterise and exclude the Other, and the scatological language that was used when the Other was either absent or powerless to retaliate, the poem couples the signifiers of separateness and degradation, relentlessly emphasizing the unsettling physical, political and psychological proximities of the "black spot" to the great Johannesburg.

Given the period in which the poem was written it is clear that the poet intended to bait the state. But there was little the state could do without attracting undue attention: Wa Mogale's collection was published shortly after he received a ten year sentence for ANC and Umkhonto we Sizwe activities. As such the poem is an example of the dialogical spaces that were constructed within the perimeters of the seemingly omnipotent regime.

More celebratory, though still realistic, is "Exit Alexandra - 23:5:74" (1982:27-8) by the KwaZulu-Natal poet Mafika Gwala. Through the reference to Christ the martyr Gwala evokes a sense of imagined community. The construction of solidarity, particularly across the geographical and linguistic divisions enforced and exploited by the state, implicitly challenges the policies of ethnic and regional fragmentation:

> Alexandra
> how can I say goodbye
> when I knew you
> before my feet ever brushed
> your dusty streets?
> At Cato Manor I touched your wounds,
> Down your 12th Avenue I found
> Clermont Central winking

The plight of township residents, who suffered crime and gangsterism, was compounded by prohibitive legislation and police harassment, as Serote's poem "Motivated to Death" (1972:50) suggests:

> We knew each other well.
> He was my brother;
> Now he's dead.
> The RSA condemned him
> Not Alex - where he died, where his killers exist.
> No!

Culpability for the man's death does not lie only with the immediate perpetrators, who were probably township *tsotsis*. With considerable irony and bitterness the persona suggests the impact of the Pass Laws Act on the dead man's life:

> His crime? (Thanks, he's beyond this now).
> He had no pass. Didn't work, had nowhere to stay.

The poem refers to the determining socio-political conditions. Not having a pass (which was difficult to secure, and had to be renewed frequently) condemned people to unemployment, homelessness and crime, if they were to survive (often at the expense of other oppressed people, as the victimization of this person illustrates). Black people have been the principal victims of the high level of crime that resulted from the structural inequities of apartheid. This was ignored in the minority state-run and commercial media, which focused on the relatively smaller proportion of white victims of crime. It appears that one of Serote's intentions in writing "Motivated to Death" was to correct the representational imbalance. More than a decade after the poem appeared, while P.W. Botha continued to proclaim the reform of apartheid, one black person was being arrested every two and a half minutes under the Pass Laws Act. Louis le Grange, the Minister of Law and Order, was compelled to acknowledge in parliament that 163 862 people had been arrested in 1984 for not being in possession of a "dompas" (*Sunday Times Extra*, 17.3.85:12).

The interrogative, single-lined concluding stanza of "Motivated to Death" offers an abrupt challenge to any assumption that even the most basic system of justice, an eye for an eye, the *lex talionis* of the ancient Hammurabic Code, should operate in apartheid South Africa:

> Me I want to believe
> That they that kill by knife
> Shall so die.
>
> Even in Alex?

The question mark that concludes the poem suggests that the second stanza challenges the assumptions of the previous twenty-two lines. The dialogic construction of the two stanzas serves paradoxically to emphasize the absence of hope. This clarifies the accusatory form of the title.

The theme of the culpability of the state is examined more thoroughly by Serote in "Alexandra" (1972:30-31), which expresses the conflict of a resident who sees the township simultaneously as parent and destroyer. While it echoes Sepamla's "Soweto", this poem goes much further:

> Were it possible to say,
> Mother, I have seen more beautiful mothers,
> A most loving mother...
> Alexandra I would have long gone from you.
>
> But we have only one mother, none can replace,
> Just as we have no choice to be born,
> We can't choose our mothers;
> We fall out of them like we fall out of life to death....
>
> Your breasts ooze the dirty waters of your dongas, waters
> diluted with the blood of my brothers, your children...
> Do you love me Alexandra, or what are you doing to me....
>
> I have seen people but I feel like I am not one,
> Alexandra what are you doing to me?
> I feel I have sunk to such meekness!
> I lie flat while others walk on me to far places.
> I have gone from you many times,
> I come back.

Through the strategy of the first-person speaker the poem conveys the suffering of someone who has been destroyed by the apartheid system. The signifier "Alexandra" links the notion of mother to the notion of home, thus uniting psychological and physical location. The implication is that South Africa is an unnatural parent who destroys her (black) child even as she gives birth to it; that (as the trope suggests) the socio-political environment produces dysfunctional people. The poet constructs a powerful indictment of the apartheid state through the mechanism of the psychological conflict (and destruction) generated by a pathological parent. By sustaining tension until the end the poem takes the reader through the process of conflict. The poem resists any easy resolution for literary catharsis was an extravagance while the apartheid regime was still on the ascendant. It is in this context that the profound abjection of the concluding lines may be understood, as a literal demonstration of how the "logic" of apartheid was fulfilled:

> Alexandra, I love you;
> I know
> When all these worlds became funny to me
> I silently waded back to you
> And amid the rubble I lay,
> Simple and black.

The persona's surrender to the reductive constructions of apartheid constitutes a low point in

resistance literature. Few resistance writers would have risked such a portrait of capitulation to the machinations of the apartheid state. However, Serote stakes his characterization on the assumption that his implied readers have the acumen to respond, not with pessimism, but with determined resistance. There are scant clues in the poem to confirm this, although Serote's subsequent work, notably the *Behold Mama, Flowers!* collection (1978), the "Time has run out" corpus (1982b:125-144) and his political activism support such an interpretation. The history of denigration and destruction led politically sophisticated poets like Serote to seek "meaning and significance in the experience of dispossession and oppression" (Levumo in Chapman, 1982:76-77).

Agency is also the focus of another significant township poem which is set, not in Alexandra, but in White City, Jabavu. "An Abandoned Bundle" (1971:60) by Oswald Mtshali also focuses on the behaviour of a mother. The details are also disturbing: a newborn infant that was placed by its mother on a rubbish heap has been mauled to death by dogs. The speaker, however, refuses to blame the mother, as the final stanza counters:

> Its mother
> had melted into the rays of the rising sun,
> her face glittering with innocence
> her heart as pure as untrampled dew.

The poet creates a dilemma for his readers. While the last two lines can be read as being ironic, it is equally possible that these lines signify the speaker's refusal to blame the mother, for much conviction is invested in the innocence of that immediate agent. Through offering the latter option, the poet guides the implied reader to recognise the culpability of a more ubiquitous agent of destruction, the state, which is responsible for the "gigantic sore" that is the township. Given the socio-economic context, the agency of the youthful, solitary (and perhaps, unwitting) parent is diminished. As in Serote's "Alexandra", this parent's culpability is reduced as a result of her own victimization in the chain of persecution.

The refusal to censure the mother may be linked to the socio-economic reality of South Africa: the infant mortality rate has been among the highest in the world. It was conservatively estimated in 1975 that between 15 000 and 27 000 children died of malnutrition (Wilson and Ramphele, 1989:101; Barnaby, 1988:168). Measles, tuberculosis, gastro-enteritis and parasitic infections such as bilharzia exacerbated the situation. About 76% of African children live in impoverished households: 70% without electricity, 32% without access to piped water and 22% without toilets (*NHS*, 1995:35). Of those children who survived infancy, one-third (ie., two million children) have been underweight and growing up stunted for lack of sufficient calories in one of the few countries in the world that exports food (Wilson and Ramphele, 1989:4, 101).

The feminization of poverty, part of a world-wide trend, has been exacerbated by apartheid. The absence of social provisioning, such as housing, welfare services and child care facilities, further threaten the stability of the family. The pressure upon the single parent has been enormous. "Alexandra" and "An Abandoned Bundle" present the maternal parent as the sole parent. The permanent or extended absence of the paternal parent (owing to the migrant labour system and other legislation that separated breadwinners working in urban areas from

their families, as well as detribalization) has profound socio-economic and psychological consequences. The low wages women receive in most societies is aggravated in a society where the majority of women suffer the added oppressions of race, class and rural location, which signify fewer jobs, lower wages and abysmal living conditions.

2.3 Hostels and migrant workers

Owing to the policies of apartheid the theme of migrancy in South African literature speaks of the experiences of a sizeable proportion of the population. One in three workers has been a migrant labourer, separated by apartheid-capitalism from their families:

> At the gold mines, which employ over half a million men, more than 97 percent of black workers are prevented by law from living with their families (Badsha and Wilson, 1986:42).

Workers have spent their entire working lives as "labour units" in single-sex hostels while their wives and children have lived in great poverty in overcrowded "reserves" (Wilson and Ramphele, 1989:4). These assertions are echoed in Karen Press's poem "Priorities" (1990a:28), which suggests the human cost of the priority of profit at the expense of all else:

> the migrant workers... live like cattle in the compounds...
> they have families, scattered like dry wood across the hills

Wilson and Ramphele's sketch of "hundreds of thousands of disgruntled men leaving hundreds of thousands of starving families in the so-called homelands" (1989:122) lends clarity to Oswald Mtshali's poem "*Amagoduka* at Glencoe Station" (1971:67-70), which deals with the long journey of migrant miners from the rural areas to the Reef. Mourning the bleak lives they leave behind, they brace themselves for dangerous working conditions and debilitating lung diseases:

> The two began to sing,
> their voices crying for the mountains
> and the hills of Msinga...
>
> They crossed rivers and streams,
> gouged dry by the sun's rays,
> where lowing cattle genuflected
> for a blade of grass and a drop of water
> on riverbeds littered with carcasses and bones...

> They told of big-bellied babies
> sucking festering fingers
> instead of their mothers shrivelled breasts...
>
> We come from across the Tugela river,
> we are going to EGoli! EGoli! EGoli!
> where they'll turn us into moles
> that eat the gold dust
> and spit out blood.

A similar dilemma is addressed in Matsemela Manaka's *Egoli* (no date), in the character John's assessment of the desperate nature of migrants' lives:

> We run. We escape. We go back to the women and children. We watch them starve. We come back again to breathe dust for them (no date:4).

In the cities and on the mines most migrants are housed in hostels, some of which accommodate more than ten thousand men (Badsha and Wilson, 1986:42). Though neglected and peripheral, the hostels have accounted for a sizeable proportion of the urban population, and for the violence. Estimates of occupancy range from 600 000 (the approximate number of beds) to COSATU's figure of 3,6 million people. Dikobe wa Mogale's poem "there are many ways" (1992:5-7) addresses the lot of migrant workers and charges that the apartheid state's mode of accommodating migrant workers was an expression of its malevolent political agenda:

> to kill a man
> simpler
> direct
> and much more neat
> is to see that he is living
> somewhere in the middle
> of the festering sore
> of poverty
>
> exhausted by hunger
> and dehydrated by thirst

Compounding such conditions, migrant workers exist on the margins of township society: their geographic isolation is matched by social and psychological isolation. The hostels

> are literally on "the edge" of society and the residents are visibly located as outsiders. Historically, this geographical marginalisation has mirrored their political marginalisation (*Weekly Mail*, 30.8.91:20-21).

Mtutuzeli Matshoba's short story "To Kill a Man's Pride" (Mutloatse, 1980:103-127) focuses on the hostel at Meadowlands township (which is among the many Reef hostels located in townships such as Dube, Nhlazane, Merafe, Nancefield, Diepkloof, Thokoza, Natalspruit and

Vosloorus). Matshoba's examination of the relationship between the hostel and township communities is both critical and sympathetic. Through his sketch of the socio-economic background of the hostel residents, Matshoba's narrator analyses how the apartheid-capitalist complex has conspired, through a web of housing policies, to secure cheap and compliant labour (from the poverty-stricken rural areas of other regions). The state and capital maintained the insecurity and the divisions between such labour through the ethnically-segregated hostels that diluted the formation of class alliances. The narrative also suggests that the state manipulated the presence of "ethnically different" hostels to hinder the development of class solidarity in the townships. The semi-documentary nature of the narrative is hinted at in the name of the narrator: "Mtutu" is a contraction of the author's name. The opening paragraph of the story develops the point made by Wa Mogale in "there are many ways" (1992:5-7), arguing that one sure way of destroying a person is to "place him in a Soweto hostel" (1980:103). In the next paragraph Matshoba's comparison of the hostel of apartheid-capital to a Nazi death camp is indicting: "North of our location lies our own Auschwitz" (1980:103).

The writer suggests that the physical segregation of the residents of Meadowlands township and the hostel inmates is reproduced in their social relations. Knowing poverty and deprivation, the township residents avoid socialising with the hostel residents whose situation is worse (except for the hostel showers). Mtutu shows the superficial relations that exist between the two oppressed communities, assuming some responsibility for his and his community's attitudes:

> Before Somdali invited me there, the hostel was a place I knew of and didn't know about. I knew it must be hell to live there - family men without families, married men without wives. That was how I had seen it, and that was where my concern ended. But when it comes to the misery of life one has to partake to really understand. The deepest pangs of a man caught up in squalor are never really felt from a safe distance. Most people shrink from experiencing what it feels like to be down, licking the base of the drain. Somdali's invitation was my chance to get to the core of hostel life.... We only went there to sell something, a watch maybe... or to use the showers and quickly return to the location (1980:114-5).

However, despite the distance between the two communities, Mtutu is befriended by Somdali, a hostel resident who generously shares the meagre resources of his town "home". The narrative contrasts the openness of Somdali with the narrator's reticence about being seen by his fellow township dwellers with a "Zulu". Mtutu's failure to reciprocate the invitation to visit issues from the same reservations. In this way the narrative renders the tacit complicity of some township residents in the perpetuation of stock images of "the Zulus" (or Xhosas, etc.) in the Reef hostels. It also clarifies the anti-Zulu (or Xhosa, etc.) prejudice in Johannesburg, which has been fanned by inimical political and media interests. Such agencies trade on crude simplifications of identity, eg., they conflate the construct of "Zulu" to mean a black, male, migrant worker from rural KwaZulu-Natal, who necessarily subscribes to an ethno-nationalist ideology. Such constructs tend to be as elaborate as they are inaccurate, serving more as symbols of prejudice than as indices of information.

Matshoba offers a compelling view of the society of the hostel residents. In Old Khuzwayo and Somdali the reader has access to characters who demonstrate sensitive responses to their makeshift lives, which contradict the stereotype of hostel dwellers as violent marauders. There are vignettes that show the vulnerability of the hostel inmates to the harsh and dangerous conditions under which all township residents live:

> The bulk of inmates chose to stay "inside" at weekends, filling the emptiness of their lives with alcohol and traditional song that brought them nostalgia for the places of their birth, the barren hopelessness of which had driven them to gather scraps in the human jungles of Johannesburg. Murder was also rife inside. Dehumanized people lose their concern for life: "We live like hogs, wild dogs or any other neglected animals. The pets of *abeLungu* live better than we," Somdali would say to me on a day when he was in a really depressed mood. Normally he never complained (1980:115).

To sustain them during the long years of their working lives they draw on their religious faith and the *ingoma ebusuku*, the urban choral music which blends church and traditional elements:

> When they sang it was from the core of their souls, their eyes glazed with memories of where they had first sung those lyrics... I went away feeling as if I had found treasure in a graveyard. Those men might be buried in the labour camps, but they are still people and, because they live in the throes of debasement, human adaptability has given them a most simple and practical approach to life (1980:123).

Such songs and dances are part of popular culture. The *isicathamiya* (that the Ladysmith Black Mambazo made famous) is a music and dance style reflecting the evolution of various dances brought from the rural areas by migrant workers as they took on the influences of urban lifestyles, music and entertainment. The soft-stepping all-male routines are in contrast to the vigorous, foot-stomping dances of people in rural KwaZulu-Natal (Barber, 1987:15; Coplan, 1985:65-7), which have influenced the *isicathulo*, the gumboot-stamping and - slapping style found in the dances of dockworkers, miners and municipal workers. Joseph Shabalala, leader of Ladysmith Black Mambazo, explained the reason for the difference in the hostel dwellers' *isicathamiya*:

> at home we had the open earth and could thud our feet firmly against the earth. But they danced ever so softly because you may not make noise for your neighbours downstairs or next door (*Weekly Mail*, 15.9.89:24;26).

In a similar way, contemporary praise poetry (*sefalo*) is derived from the traditional *lithoko*.

Women have also been compelled by poverty and destitution to work in the towns and cities (often as domestic workers), leaving behind their children. Gcina Mhlope, the well known storyteller, who is considered the new Nolali (a mythical itinerant storyteller) of the urban areas, has argued that a key factor in the erosion of the story telling art has been "the fragmentation of the family due to the migrant labour system" (*Weekly Mail*, 19.5.89:28).

Mhlope was evidently thinking of women, who have been the principal story tellers (as the *ntsomi* of the Cape attest).

Hostel populations changed dramatically in the late 1980s, owing to a range of factors, including the chronic shortage of alternative accommodation for women, and the impact of the civil war, which displaced people from areas such as southern Natal. For these reasons, women and children came to comprise an estimated one-third of the hostel population on the Reef (Cooper, 1993:231). However, there is little in the literature in English that represents these developments.

2.4 Forced removals

Forced removals have had devastating consequences for individuals, families and communities, adding more stress to lives that were already precarious. Serote's early poem "The Three Mothers" (1972:28) captures the only certainty in the lives of the millions of victims of the land grabbing that occurred:

> Tomorrow we know,
> We shall be homeless, just that.

Residential segregation was integral to the ideological imperatives of the apartheid government. The uprooting of millions of people was necessary to achieve segregated cities and ethnic homelands. The term "forced removals" has encompassed a number of categories such as "black spot" removals; the eviction of Black people from white-owned farms, to be sent to "native reserves"/"homelands"; removals under the Group Areas Act, from one part of an urban area to another to create segregated residential areas; the expulsion of black people from urban areas; township removals; and the demolition of squatter settlements (Wilson and Ramphele, 1989:216).

Many people who lived in the urban areas were forced to move more than once, as the state's policies took effect in successive areas. Another poem of Serote's, "Death Survey" (1982b:63-4), offers an ironic commentary on the devastation caused by the machinery of the state:

> this bloody bulldozer had done a good job and its teeth dripped blood;
> bricks-pillars-hunks-of-concrete-zincs-broken-
> steps-doors-broken-glasses-crooked window-panes-
> broken-flower-pots-planks-twisted-shoes
> lay all over the show
> like a complete story

The last two lines are bitterly ironic, given the millions of lives that were shattered. Between

1960 and 1983 more than 3.5 million black people were subjected, in terms of government policy, to forced removals. The Surplus People's Project estimated that 75% of the people who were forcibly moved were Africans, and the rest were mainly Coloureds and Indians (Omond, 1985:114-5). Hardly anyone was moved to a better area than the one from which they were evicted. Through a battery of laws that were enforced by a brutal security force, people were deprived of citizenship rights, and the attendant political and social rights. A line from Mzwakhe Mbuli's poem "Do not push us too far" (1989:37-8) focuses on where displaced people were deposited, suggesting some of the consequences of forced removals for people, particularly old people:

> My people have been pushed into overcrowded graveyards in South Africa.

The worst affected were more than 2 million people who were simultaneously robbed of any citizenship rights they possessed in South Africa and shunted into desolate bantustan "homelands" (Lelyveld, 1986:124), which had been concocted out of 13% of the most barren, parched and remote fragments of land. This group of people formed part of the 9 million people who had been formally deprived of their South African citizenship through the "independence" of Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei (Wilson and Ramphele, 1989:212). The assignment of inverse proportions of land to "population groups" represented a particularly diabolical apartheid equation. Few of these two million people had any actual connection to the homelands to which they were assigned, notwithstanding the apartheid-based arguments regarding the "traditional homelands" of African people.

2.4.1 "Black spot" removals

"Black spots" referred to properties which fell outside areas designated for African occupation, and which were held on freehold terms by Africans, or in trust by church missions. The paradox of such a designation on the African continent was wasted on the state.

Driefontein in northern KwaZulu-Natal did not fit in with the government's policy of "separate development". A "black spot" since 1912, it was bought by Pixley ka Seme just a year before the Native Land Act of 1913 came into force. Despite its name the act was designed to deprive Black people of access to land ownership (the nature of the misrepresentation attests to the fraudulence of the discourse). In the 1960s the government tried to break up the community into ethnic groups and settle the "Swazi people" in KaNgwane and the "Zulu people" in KwaZulu. Most people dissented, and had to endure police harassment. In 1983 the community leader Saul Mkhize was killed for no apparent reason by a policeman during a residents' meeting to discuss the removal. However, spurred by the example of their dead leader, the people of Driefontien continued to resist removal. After their struggle began to receive international support they were granted a reprieve in

1985.

When the inquiry into Saul Mkhize's death eventually occurred the judge stated that Mkhize had been an "arrogant, somewhat impolite man with a strong personality", and declared himself impressed with the evidence of the self-confessed killer, Constable Nienaber (*New Nation*, 5.2.87:9). As Nienaber was allowed to go free the people of Driefontein expressed their feelings about the arbitrary nature of the administrative and legislative systems that controlled their lives:

> We are like dead meat now. We can be shot at any time, quite freely. We are like birds in the sky to be aimed at (1987:9).

Like many other communities across the country, the people of Mogopa were even worse off. In 1983 they were forcibly expelled from the fertile farmland they had formally occupied since 1912, and the land was leased to white farming unions. The community of four thousand people was fragmented and scattered. They took the case to the Appeal Court, which declared in 1985 that the government had acted illegally. Then the (so-called) Development Minister, Gerrit Viljoen used alternative powers to arbitrarily expropriate Mogopa and to prevent people from returning (*Weekly Mail*, 17.2.89:10).

Official "reform" discourse, which was characterised by falsehoods, contradictions and disregard for the rule of law (as the Mogopa and Driefontein cases illustrate), sharpened the insecurity of oppressed people. Residents of Oukasie near Brits, were first threatened with removal in 1985. When Chris Heunis, the Minister for Constitutional Development and Planning, made a statement that people would not be resettled against their will, the Oukasie residents thought they had a reprieve. In April 1988, Heunis retracted the statement, adding even more confusingly, that residents would be moved "voluntarily" 25 km away. This double-speak enraged residents and hastened activists into hiding for under the State of Emergency they were easy targets of the security forces (*Weekly Mail*, 8.4.88:7).

Government equivocation in the 1980s exacerbated the land crisis: the government denied that it had a policy of forced removals, even as it was trying to legalise it. Dikobe wa Mogale renders the prevarication of the apartheid government in "forced removals" (1984:29):

> in my country, resettlement is a polite word
> for forced removals

In May 1987 P.W. Botha declared that forced removals had been stopped. More than a year later, in September 1988, Chris Heunis was announcing that the government still intended to move 24 000 people. As late as 1989 five million people continued to face the threat of displacement (Newton, 1989:403-4).

2.4.2 The Group Areas Act

The Group Areas Act, a cornerstone of apartheid (along with the Population Registration Act and the Mixed Marriages Act), was among the first legislation to be introduced by the National Party government when it came into power in 1948. In the National Party government's lexicon the term "group areas" signified demarcated land (usually in urban areas) which could only be owned and occupied by people of a particular race group. Through this act the government moved black people around at will. Mixed residential communities in Marabastad in Pretoria, Sophiatown in Johannesburg, Cato Manor in Durban and District Six in Cape Town were destroyed.

Over the years many artists have addressed the loss of District Six. Abdullah Ibrahim (also known as Dollar Brand) has written many songs about his old home, David Kramer and Taliep Petersen developed *District Six - the Musical*, Achmat Dangor wrote the novella *Waiting For Leila* (1981), Richard Rive wrote several pieces about his old home district, including the novel *Buckingham Palace, District Six* and Yunus Ahmed directed the film *Dear Grandfather, your right foot is missing* (Table Mountain is personified as the grandparent). In the poem "District Six: Ghost Town" (Coetzee and Willemse, 1989:21-22) Keith Adams addresses the consequences of the expropriation of the vibrant community:

> the houses have long gone
> and the ghosts
> of my ancestors
> play haunting melodies
> on nameless street corners...
>
> Now when the rumble
> of the bulldozers reach me
> and the sight
> of the homeless
> seeking shelter
> in smashed buildings
> I discover
> the hate still simmering.

Rupture and relocation are key themes in the narrative of forced removals in South Africa, as people exhausted by apartheid's many cruelties discovered that not even the home offered sanctuary from the malevolent minority government.

2.4.3 Township removals

Most of the structural violence that was inflicted on black people was part of a plan to create and maintain spatial boundaries to give content to the ideology of separateness. The institutional violence of apartheid was motivated by reasons that were often bizarre. When the authorities decided that the township of Langa was located too close to the "white" area of Uitenhage, they forcibly relocated 40 000 people to Kwanobuhle township. Most townships consist of rows of tiny, semi-detached, hollow cement-block and asbestos-roofed "matchbox houses" with an outside bathroom-cum-toilet. The older township houses did not have water or electricity (some still await basic utilities). Molahlehi J. Mutle's "Evictions - White City Jabavu August 1986" (1990:83) addresses the impact of township removals upon the victims:

> We heard in the middle of the night
> The droning and rumbling of massive war tanks,
> Harsh sounds of Hippos and Casspirs...
> They tore down our fence...
> "VULA... VULA... VULA
> MAAK OOP DIE DONDERSE DEUR...
> OPEN UP"
>
> They drove us into one corner with sjamboks,
> Grabbed our furniture,
> Threw it out the door
> And flung us headlong onto it.
>
> We were teargassed, shot and killed,
> Cut to ribbons with sjamboks;
> They tap-danced on our torsos,
> Trampled us in the dust
> And drove us to nowhere.

Mutle suggests that location is critical to the identity of the individual and the community. In the line "We were teargassed, shot and killed", the speaker defiantly clings to an embattled sense of communal identity. The line does not only refer to the individual psyches that were mangled by the forced removals, for when people were summarily relocated family units were threatened, extended family and friendship networks were shattered, and long-established communities were destroyed. This is suggested in the despair in the concluding lines of the poem:

> haggard and grey outcasts
> Weeping and wailing saying:
> "Where do we go from here?"

Mafika Gwala's early poem "Promise" (Royston, 1973:61) offers a succinct account of the effects of forced removals on family life and friendships:

"At least we can meet at the Indian market"
She said way back in Cato Manor.
Haven't met her since.
She, pushed into Umlazi
Me, pushed into KwaMashu.

Senzo Malinga addresses a similar issue in his subtle and restrained poem "The Only House with a Gate" (*Staffrider* 9.2 1990:69). The activist expresses the consequences of demolition for a community and a friendship, after the forced removals at St Wendolin's, near Pinetown:

"The only house with a gate
after Thembalihle Fresh Produce,
that pink store up the sandy road";
That was six months ago
when we met on Hill Street, Pinetown
Your mother was still at Checkers
but my bus was already idling.

Some people say
you must have moved to KwaNdengezi
Some say
you surely must be lodging at Claremont
Ah, I've walked the whole day
looking for the only house with a gate
after the pink store
This is St Wendolin's that once was

Ja, the cattle kraals are still there
standing agape...
Some people say the cattle were scattered
by teargas fumes...
Maybe this is the only house which had a gate.
Maybe scavengers took the gate
to the blacksmith or the scrap collector.

The home that the speaker remembers was destroyed during the forced removals at St Wendolin's. The gate, a distinguishing characteristic of the smallholding, signified little in that it did not protect the family or their animals from the eviction squads of the state. And so the speaker, an old friend of the family, searches in vain. The speaker's quiet manner serves as a foil against which the reader infers the significance of the destruction that has occurred in this area. The abrupt changes that occurred in the peri-urban landscape reflected the contingency of life for most African people.[1]

Many African families faced eviction from their township homes as a result of legislation that was as racist as it was sexist. In the satirical poem "The Will" (1975:23) Sipho Sepamla addresses the disinheritance of African families by South African law: upon the death of the *paterfamilias*, the legal right to the home could not be transferred to the wife or their children.

The house, by right,
you will have to vacate
surrender the permit
and keep your peace

The death of the father meant eviction. The precarious fate of the township family in the displacement is suggested in the following lines:

The peach tree uproot
it might grow in the homelands
so might it be with your stem

Another text which illustrates the impact of the legislation is Mbongeni Ngema's *Asinamali!* (1985)[2], where Bheki Mqadi narrates how his new-found girlfriend lost the right to live in the house of her deceased husband.

Under apartheid African women had the status of minors, irrespective of their age or achievements. Throughout her life a woman had to remain under the legal authority of either her father, her husband or a chief, an example of the collusion of colonialism and traditional patriarchy that negated the benefits of the legal reforms that other South African women had obtained.

In Sepamla's poem "Hurry up to it!" (1975:69-70), a father counsels his son about the problems the laws of separate development have raised against marriage. Satire is used to render the aggravation and disappointment that have resulted from the apartheid laws:

love is:
Knowing the girl's homeland,
Knowing her papers are right,
Knowing she has permission to marry

2.4.4 Shacks and squatter camps

> in terms of the Gini coefficient, South Africa has the highest measure of inequality of the 57 countries for which data are available (Wilson and Ramphele, 1989:4).

"*Imijondolo*" is an isiZulu term referring to the shacks or squatter settlements that have been sprung up across the country. Informal settlements in Winterveld (Pretoria), Crossroads

(Cape Town), Inanda and Malukazi (Durban) represent a desperate and makeshift attempt on the part of poor and powerless people to deal with the National Party government's failure to cater realistically for the urban housing needs of the majority of the population. The ailing but feisty Ouma in Ponkie Khazamula's short story "I won't be moved" (Mabuza, 1989:31-47) has spent her life being forced to move from Sophiatown to Evaton to Lady Selbourne to a house in 6th Avenue, Alexandra, and finally to a shack which she refuses to vacate, and where she dies.

Mafika Gwala's poem "Afrika at a Piece (On Heroes Day)" (1982:44-46) deals with the socio-economic depredations that have resulted from precarious accommodation:

> Our present is naked ribbed stomachs and TB coughs
> at Limehill, Dimbaza, Winterveldt
> It is panga attacks and rape
> at Tin Town, Malacca Road, Crossroads

There has been little agreement on the number of shacks. The National Party government put the figure at 3,6 million, the Urban Foundation maintained it was closer to 7 million, and Operation Masakhane believed it to be 10 million (Cooper, 1993:215-6). Even if the figure of 7 million is used, it signifies that squatter camps have accommodated one in three urban South Africans (*New Nation*, 27.7.90:6). Other research suggests that as many as 20% of the black work force live in shacks (*Weekend Mail*, 22.6.90:17).

While Modikwe Dikobe's poignant poem "Shantytown removal" (1983:30-31) addresses the history of squatter harassment by the state, Jeremy Cronin's "Faraway city, there..." (1983:70-1) expresses mixed feelings about his home city Cape Town. Cape Town has had a dismal record of servicing the needs of African people and a particularly bad record of squatter evictions. Cronin demonstrates that a poem can balance romantic and political commitment: the quest of lovers to find commitment is paralleled by the speaker's struggle between his love for the city and his dismay at the council's inhumane response to the poor. This is also paralleled by the commitment of the "broken and unbreakable" squatters to rebuild their shacks, despite the endless threat of destruction by the council. The sense of the value of human life and endeavour that comes through in this poem is in contrast to the brutal treatment of millions of people:

> There in Cape Town where
> they're smashing down homes
> of the hungry, labouring people
> - will you wait for me, my love?
>
> In that most beautiful,
> desolate city of my heart
> where if staying on were passive
> life wouldn't be what it is.
>
> Not least for those rebuilding
> yet again their demolished homes

with bits of plastic, port jackson saplings,
anything to hand - unshakeably

Defiant, frightened, broken,
and unbreakable are the people of our city.

The history of South Africa in this century is filled with clashes between shack dwellers, local authorities and police, of which the Cape Town squatter camp of Crossroads is an example. The play *Imfuduso* was created by the women of Crossroads in the late 1970s to express their struggles (1987b:264). Crossroads is the only squatter settlement of thirty-seven in the Western Cape in the 1970s to have survived into the 1980s. It became an international symbol of the resistance of poor migrants to state oppression.

> In the long struggle at Crossroads, bulldozers have been used, batons have been wielded and, in 1985, bullets were fired (at least 18 persons were killed) (Wilson and Ramphele, 1989:216).

Worse was to follow, for the state came increasingly to rely on the terror created by vigilantes to destablise resisting communities. To obscure the connection between the vigilantes and itself the state perpetuated the old racial stereotype of internecine battles among blacks, which gave it an excuse to move in (under the guise of restoring order) and deal with the squatters.

In 1986 the state launched a raid in Crossroads that achieved what it had been trying to do for a decade. Since it could not legally burn down thousands of shacks, the state security forces (sic) worked with the vigilante group that had been established in the camp, the Witdoeke led by Johnson Ngxobongwana. In a month of fighting between comrades and state-backed armed vigilantes, 60 people died (including a journalist) and over 70 000 were left homeless. Crossroads' residents testified in court to how the stalemated battle between the Witdoeke and the comrades turned after the police used tear gas and advanced, putting the comrades and residents who were defending their homes to flight. The police stood by while the vigilantes set fire to the area. A refugee center and about 5 000 shacks were burnt (*Weekly Mail*, 19.12.87:4). Residents were not allowed to return. They were instructed to move to another area twenty kilometres away (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:136).

Mavis Smallberg's poem "Crossroads" (Coetzee and Willemse, 1989:137-141), dated May 1986, delineates the increasing complexities of squatter camp existence as the state of emergency advanced, allowing government forces the power to act with increasing impunity. The poem is both a sharp sketch of a South African Defence Force/vigilante raid, and a militant call (in the vocative case) that rallied the residents of Crossroads to resist. The residents, though "stuck together with courage", stood little chance:

scatter, youth, scatter
stones dripping from pockets
scatter from death...

run, woman, run
run into the night

run from the gun...

plan, comrade, plan
strategise around the man
who comes in a van
who comes in a buffel
who comes in a casspir
who smiles as he shoots
and rapes your grandmother

Given that it was written after a specific incident the tense of the poem is surprising, but suggests the ongoing nature of the battles the residents had to face, with only their determination to help them against the Witdoeke.

The state and its cohorts in the media continued to use terms like "faction fights" or "black-on-black violence" to describe the ongoing conflict in settlements like Crossroads, even when it became public knowledge that the state was implicated. The rhetoric served two ends: it disguised the role of the state and its shadowy death squads in the instigation and maintenance of the conflict that occurred across the country, and it sought to promote a favourable interpretation of the state's involvement.

Keith Gottschalk, a white Cape Town academic and activist, challenged the harassment of the Crossroads residents in "Pogrom: 18 May 1986" (Oliphant, 1992:445). The poem begins by disputing the stock image of Cape Town as the welcoming "mother city", given its long history of hostility (while under white rule) to African settlement. The poem goes on to give content to the image of the organised massacre that the title announces.

The City is unseeing; and has myriad eyes.
The City is friendless; and has numberless friends.
The City is inhabited; bodies lie in its streets.

Yesterday Kishniev; today Nyanga Bush.
Yesterday the Black Hundreds; today the Witdoeks.
Yesterday Jews; today our comrades.

They are displeased. They act.
Law grows out of the barrel of guns;
death is a balaclava away.

We hurry, and turn a corner;
our hopes and hiding places
one step ahead of them.

In the last stanza that is cited the ambiguity about the reference of the word "we" is strategic. It could signify an affirmation of solidarity by a middle-class white poet with the besieged squatters, and therefore a distancing of himself from any collusion. Or it could be a Brechtian reminder (as stanza two suggests) that the more fortunate groups cannot dodge the reality of

the persecutions around them, because it is merely a matter of time before their own interests and values are threatened by the increasingly fascist regime.

From exile Sankie Nkondo wrote "Ticking Pulse (for Tsotsobe and others on the pulse of the fighting squatters)" (1990:45-7), in solidarity with the squatter resistance against the state.

2.5 Commuting from the dumping grounds

Commuting has been a key symbol of the displacement of African people in South Africa. Conceptualised as foreigners by the apartheid state, most people have had to travel great distances between home and work, and very few had any choice over commuting or becoming migrant workers. People who were torn from their homes under "black spot" or township removals, who were expelled from the urban areas, or whose shack settlements were demolished had "nowhere" to go, as Molahlehi J. Mutle says succinctly in "Evictions - White City Jabavu August 1986" (1990:83), which is a fair description of places like Khayelitsha, 25 kilometres from Cape Town, where Crossroads' residents were dumped. Across the country black people have had to travel great distances to go to work. It is estimated that about "80% of black workers spent an average of two-and-a-half hours daily travelling to and from work" (*Weekend Mail*, 22 June 1990:17). Unreliable, expensive and dangerous transport systems exacerbate the stress of the long journeys.

People who were dumped in the "homelands" have been worst off. Construed by the apartheid state as foreigners and forcibly exiled to the homelands, millions of black people have only been permitted into "South Africa" from "their" homelands in the form of migrant or peripatetic labour. While some obtained work that permitted them to live temporarily in hostels (eg., miners), many have had to travel long distances between the rural dumping grounds and the "white" towns and cities to make a living:

> 600,000 people commute daily from the rural Bantustans to the "white" cities. As many as 20 percent of these workers - the "night riders" - travel 3.5 to 7 hours per day, snatching a few hours sleep before boarding the buses again (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:126).

Some of the problems of commuting across vast distances twice daily are captured in a set of photographs by David Goldblatt, entitled "The Night Riders of KwaNdebele" (Badsha and Wilson, 1986:35-41). The context of these photographs is explained by the *New York Times* journalist, Joseph Lelyveld (1987). Lelyveld and Goldblatt set out to describe the impact of commuting on people who had been forced to settle in KwaNdebele, but who had to travel to the distant Pretoria area for work. The Putco company has been running 263 buses a day from Pretoria to the resettlement camps of KwaNdebele alone (Lelyveld, 1987:122). One of the worst cases involved people from Kameelrivier, who had to catch a bus at 2H40 to reach a

Pretoria terminus at 6H15, from where they would take connecting buses to get to work (1987:128). Every day workers averaged five or six hours of travelling time, with some spending as many as eight hours getting to and from work. When people return home, some at around 20H30 at night, they have very little time to attend to the needs of their families, their domestic tasks, and to sleep (1987:126). The example of "KwaNdebele, a nation of sleepwalkers" (Lelyveld, 1987:127) clarifies Wally Serote's assertive poem "There will be a better time" (1982:142-4):

> we fight
> or begin a fight
> by waking up at six because we said we would
> wake up at that time
> and sleep at ten or anytime which we decide
> because we said we would
> time has run out for those who ride on others

It emerges that some of the struggles of oppressed people were around absolute basics, such as sufficient sleep, since even that fundamental right was directly threatened by the policies of the state. Lelyveld and Goldblatt's work suggests the ease with which the state quelled huge numbers of people, merely through the mechanism of sleep deprivation and without needing to resort to military coercion:

> The story of the nightriders would be unbelievable if it were not so mundane, so chillingly and horrifically ordinary in the context of South Africa.... the work functions as a chronicle. It bears witness to the things that are happening around us, and that they are happening only because of government policy (*Weekly Mail*, 11.8.89:24-25).

The location of KwaNdebele produced exactly what the state required, notwithstanding its reformist discourse in the 1980s. In this context, Serote's demand regarding "waking up at six because we said we would" cannot be taken for petulance but as an assertion of a basic right. Serote's contention, understood in conjunction with Goldblatt and Lelyveld's work, exposes the apartheid lie of "independent and self-governing homelands", and shows that the role of the homelands included syphoning off a sizeable proportion of the "black masses", leaving South Africa with a smaller, more malleable black labour force, whose demands could be diluted by competition with the desperate "guest labour" from the "independent states".

2.6 Homeless people

As a result of the influx controls and the pass laws, many people were unable to find work and went homeless. The impact of the pass laws upon joblessness and homelessness is incalculable, as poems by Roseline Naapo and Wally Serote suggest. In "Street Sleeper" (Oliphant, 1991:23) Roseline Naapo, a domestic worker and organiser, begins by challenging her readers to understand the structural reasons behind homelessness:

> Ask me why?
> Before you call me
> A street sleeper

Serote's "Motivated to Death" (1972:50) is a sustained critique of the state's culpability for the problem of homelessness and its repercussions:

> The RSA condemned him...
> He had no pass. Didn't work, had nowhere to stay.

The chain of consequences led inevitably to the subject's death as his homelessness rendered him vulnerable to the *tsotsi* (township thug) element:

> he died alone:
> His death-bed, a muddy donga,
> His blankets, the dewy green grass

Oswald Mtshali's poem "A Brazier in the Street" (1972:19) uses child-like imagery to render the cold and hunger experienced by street children:

> The wintry air nipped their navels
> as a calf would suck the nipple...
> the starless night gaped
> and gulped down the foursome.

Images of the natural elements feeding upon the children suggest the hunger of the children. The concluding lines, which also transfer the experience of hunger, this time to a distanced cosmos, suggest the plight of the children in a disinterested society.

The *NHS* report points out that "[p]overty and feelings of powerlessness are closely related" (1995:95), and this is the point of Serote's early poem "Burning Cigarette" (1972:20), which alludes to the objectification of poor black people in the interests of the exploitative multinational capital that flourished in South Africa:

> This little black boy
> Is drawn like a cigarette from its box,
> Lit.
> He looks at his smoke hopes
> That twirl, spiral, curl

To nothing.
He grows like cigarette ashes
As docile, as harmless;
Is smothered.

The representation of the life of a child as a disposable commodity challenges cynical capitalist accumulation in "Third World" societies: the poem alludes to the tobacco cartels, which, hounded by pressure groups in western countries, began to move their operations to the susceptible and defenceless populations of the South.

The influx controls and the pass laws were responsible for the criminalisation of people who had more right to be in this country than anyone else. Mbongeni Ngema's *Asinamali* (1985) details the exhausting bureaucratic path that all migrant workers had to undergo, often fruitlessly: "Where's your pass book? Where's your work seeker's permit? Where is your special permit to be in the city?" The paper chase that attends the struggle to obtain these documents is debilitating: the migrant has to go through "the District chief, the District Bantu Affairs commissioner, the District doctor, and again the District Bantu Affairs commissioner." If the migrant was successful all that this meant was that he was in possession of a (temporary) work seeker's permit, and not a work permit. The special permit (work permit) could only be obtained upon securing employment, and necessitated another paper chase. There were severe penalties for people failing to comply with the system.

> Over the seventy years from 1916 when the first statistics were recorded until 1986 when the pass laws were formally abolished, the total number of people prosecuted in South Africa for being in some place (generally an urban area) without official permission was well over 17 000 000. All of them were African. This means that one person was arrested on average once every two minutes, day and night.... At their peak, during the decade from 1965 to 1975, the number of arrests averaged more than one every minute (Wilson and Ramphele, 1989:209).

During the period 1970-1990, streetchildren and other homeless people tended to be harassed by the police (through patrols, lock-ups and removals), which meant that there were few "loiterers" in the urban areas, and that those who were there tended to keep a low profile. Bheki Mqadi, a character in Mbongeni Ngema's *Asinamali* (1985) tells of how he had to sleep at Durban Station for four months, when he first arrived in the city, in the company of many other homeless people. Later, when he went to live at his girlfriend's home in Lamontville he did not fare much better, for he was arrested and imprisoned for contravening influx control regulations, among other trumped up charges.

The increased vulnerability of homeless women and children is addressed in the poem "Priorities" by Karen Press (1990a:28):

the land shrinks under its burden of homeless
she thinks of a place where the nights are safe for a woman alone

before this, even, there is the need
to put food in people's mouths

the next generation is starving to death on our doorsteps

Responding to a host of crises, the speaker struggles to overcome a sense that these are competing oppressions. Women and children have been at great risk, with extremely high levels of physical and mental violence consequent upon the social degradation that has occurred.

A line from Serote's poem "Behold Mama, Flowers" sums up the simple longing in all these voices for a fundamental right: "all i needed was to have a home and sing my songs" (1978:49). The poem was written in exile, a condition that can itself be described as being bereft of home.

2.7 Exile

ah
africa
is this not your child come home
(Serote, 1975:61)

Poems about exile assert the voices that have been excluded and the sense of belonging that contradicts the fact of banishment. In "Time Has Run Out" (1982b:132) Wally Serote addresses the poignancy of the peculiarly South African version of internal exile:

alas
we did amazing things to say simple things:
we are human and this is our land.
we walked the streets and roads of this country
longing for a home on our land

The banishment of some two million South Africans to bantustans to which many had no connection was a form of exile as devastating as its better known counterpart. In the final stanza of "What's in this Black Shit" (1972:16) Serote's speaker deals aggressively with the issue of being summarily "endorsed" (a parody of government legalese), to Middleburg (sic). Middelburg had the reputation of being one of the most brutal municipalities in South Africa, with the police free to kill, maim, torture, imprison or otherwise harass black civic or political activists, with the complicity of the local judicial structures, which declined to note or to respond to the few complaints that were made (*Sunday Independent*, 9.2.97).

The more common idea of political exile is addressed in "Shadows behind, before" by Ingrid de Kok (Coetzee and Willemse, 1989:51-2), which captures the instability and distress of the

predicament, as well as the dubious transactions that become necessary to keep the splintering self together:

> the myth of the exile, wanderer,
> carrying loss like a bomb under his coat,
> a load of winter wood on his back,
> mercenary of his heart's plunder

Arthur Nortje's poem "Waiting", from his collection *Dead Roots* (1973:90-1), elaborates upon the same theme, conveying the wrench and desolation that resulted from the exit permit (which, ironically, barred the bearer from returning to South Africa):

> The isolation of exile is a gutted
> warehouse at the back of pleasure streets...
> I peer through the skull's black windows
> wondering what can credibly save me.
> The poem trails across the ruined wall
> a solitary snail....
> Come back, come back *mayibuye*
> cried the breakers of stone and cried the crowds....
> I suffer the radiation burns of silence.
> It is not cosmic immensity or catastrophe
> that terrifies me:
> it is solitude that mutilates

A high proportion of established black South African writers were forced to become exiles as a consequence of state persecution. Like Nat Nakasa, Arthur Nortje was severely afflicted by the isolation and loneliness of exile, and like him, he committed suicide. Serote's later collections, *No Baby Must Weep* (1975), *Behold Mama, Flowers!* (1978) and *The Night Keeps Winking* (1982a) convey the feelings of restlessness, the longing and the endless quest of exiles for the irreconcilables of home and freedom.

Dennis Brutus, the poet, academic and activist who engineered the international sports boycott that demoralised the supporters of apartheid wrote "Sequence for South Africa" (Plumpp, 1982:25-6) among other poems about the struggle of exiles to deal with their predicament:

> exile is not amputation,
> there is no bleeding wound
> no torn flesh and severed nerves;
> the secret is clamping down
> holding the lid of awareness tight shut -
> sealing in the acrid searing stench
> that scalds the eyes,
> swallows up the breath
> and fires the brain in a wail -
> until some thoughtless questioner
> pries the sealed lid loose;

I can exclude awareness of exile
until someone calls me one...

Exile
is the reproach
of beauty
in a foreign landscape,
vaguely familiar
because it echoes
remembered beauty.

The struggle to establish as normal a life as possible in exile was fraught, particularly as the political ideal of liberation remained far from attainment. However, the exiles turned their dispossession into a source of renewal, as they worked at developing political solidarity, strengthening the struggle against the apartheid state and establishing connections with other oppressed communities.

The liberation struggle was maintained in exile over the period of three decades. South African writers in exile included Keorapetse Kgositsile, Lewis Nkosi, Lauretta Ngcobo, Mazisi Kunene, Barry Feinberg, Breyten Breytenbach, Sankie Nkondo, Zinjiva Winston Nkondo, Mandla Langa and Es'kia Mphahlele. Some activists made time to write poetry and short stories about their experiences as South Africans: Lindiwe Mabuza compiled a collection *One Never Knows* (1989) with contributions by Ponkie Khazamula, Rebecca Matlou (Sankie Nkondo) and Dulcie September, among other women activists. Dulcie September, the ANC representative in France, was quite likely killed by a death squad. The "total onslaught" raids of the South African Defence Force (SADF) compounded the tribulations of the exiles. Serote lost a close friend, comrade and founder-member of the Medu Art Ensemble, the artist Thamsanqa Mnyele, during one of the SADF's cross-border raids on Botswana:

we walked the long and hot roads or streets dying poor
and foolish deaths...
remember
how jails like graves claimed us
to cage us if we were not shot
so we can know lots about being whipped
(1982:125-134)

Sipho Sepamla's speaker in "The Exile" (Couzens and White, 1982:335) keeps faith with those forced to become outcasts by the regime, neatly reciprocating the commitment of activist-poets like Serote, Brutus and Kgositsile:

In those distant places
where my voice might not reach
know that I'm tanning a melody for you.

The solidarity of the activists and writers within and without South Africa was sustained in

the literature that defied the system, such as Don Mattera's poem "Exiles..." (1983:111-112), dedicated to Mongane Serote, Dennis Brutus and Miriam Makeba. The Pietermaritzburg activist Ben J. Langa wrote the poem "For my brothers (Mandla and Bheki) in exile" (Couzens and Patel, 1982:354-356), affirming ties of family and shared suffering, despite the long and seemingly endless separation:

> Maybe I do not know where you are.
> You left in the stealth of the night
> Maybe hiked miles in fear but determined
> To finally reach new worlds unknown.
> The old woman is still around, brothers,
> Heavy creases run down her mahogany face;
> They are dry rivulets opened by heavy rains of pain.
> At night, alone in the vaults of darkness,
> She prays. In her prayer she talks about you.
> Mama cries at night - by day she laughs

The writer did not survive to see his exiled brothers return. He was killed, the victim of a dirty tricks scam that had its origins in the security forces. Neither did his mother survive to see the return of her exiled children.

A determinedly positive poem about political exile is Daniel P. Kunene's "Do not ask me" (Couzens and Patel, 1982:403-4), which strategically inverts the relationship between the mother and (exasperated) child:

> Do not ask me mother why they left
> Need I tell you
> They took the *amasi* bird out of the forbidden pot
> and bade it fill their clay bowls to the very brim
> they'd been so hungry
> so long

Based on the oral myth of the magical *amasi* bird that provides food for the hungry, the poem renders a child's grasp of the ideological imperatives that led to exile. The impatience of the child challenges those who would not acknowledge the necessity for some politically committed South Africans to go into exile, ie., to abandon home for the long journey of liberation by which they hoped eventually to reach home.

Notes

1. Postscript: the struggle of the St. Wendolin's community had a happier ending than most of the others. In 1994 the St. Wendolin's community

> won a major battle to buy back eight plots that they were forced to sell for "peanuts" to Indians in the early 1970s under the Group Areas Act.... The St Wendolin's community lost their land when the area was deproclaimed for black occupation and proclaimed an Indian group area. However, the Government expropriated the land from Indian owners following pressure by the St Wendolin's Property Owners' Association (*Natal Mercury*, 20.10.94:4).

2. *Asinamali* was workshopped between 1983 and 1985. The play has undergone changes over the years. The version that is cited is an early performance of the play (1985) at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg, which was directed for broadcast by the British Broadcasting Co-operation by Ross Devenish. The BBC video has been quite widely viewed in South Africa. Because a video of a performance is cited, there are no page references. Subsequent playscripts (eg., Ndlovu, 1986:177-224 and Ngema, 1995:1-53) differ from the taped 1985 performance.

Chapter Three: Security force repression: resistance writers "touch this darkness and give it meaning"[1]

3.1 Introduction

> Three out of five governments spend more on military "defence" than on the defence against all the enemies of good health (Barnaby, 1988:14).

While a huge proportion of the world's resources is spent on the military, resulting in deficits in all other sectors of human need, the situation in South Africa has been even worse, as the apartheid regime used the military to secure the domination of a tiny minority against a disempowered majority. The repressive activities of the state security forces included military intervention in the frontline states. This is addressed in the resistance literature of the period, which examines the blitzes, parcel bombs, car bombs, assassinations and abductions that the liberation movements sustained.

The repression of political and civic activities within the country was carried out by different sections of the security forces. The "formal repression" included the security force seige of the townships, intense police surveillance, political trials, shootings, restrictions, bannings, listings, deportations, political hangings and deaths in detention. The security forces were also involved in clandestine activities such as death threats, smear campaigns, abductions, shootings, murders, assassinations, and bombings, the extent of which continues to emerge. While this chapter focuses on the way in which resistance literature addresses the activities of the security forces, two closely related issues, the deaths of activists at the hands of the security forces or in detention, and the funerals of activists are dealt with in a qualitatively different way by a range of writers, and therefore necessitates analysis in a further chapter.

3.2 Attacks on neighbouring states

> The sound of their [SADF] guns remind me that
> the Portugese lost the war in Mozambique
> (the prisoners' song in *Asinamali*, 1985).

As the frontline states of Tanzania, Zambia, Angola, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe won political independence through anti-colonial struggles, the South African regime became

increasingly isolated and threatened. In the process of waging armed struggles against colonialism, Angolans, Mozambicans and Zimbabweans developed regional solidarity. Tanzania served as the frontline state for the Mozambican struggle, and Zambia and Mozambique served as frontline states for the Zimbabwean struggle (Ling in Turok, 1990:9).

The Treason Trials and the harsh jail sentences that were imposed on the organisers of the "Viva Frelimo!" rallies in 1976 indicate the regime's concerns about the influence of the independent neighbouring states on the South African resistance. To ensure that it remained in power the South African regime had to undermine or destroy the support that the freedom struggles in South Africa and Namibia received from the frontline states. At the very least it had to destroy the image of freedom that these states projected. There were other reasons for attacking the frontline states: to destabilise them and to increase their dependence on South Africa; and to destroy their radical socio-political experiments, for their principles of anti-colonialism, non-racism, socialism and democracy were the very reverse of the ideology of apartheid. The apartheid regime showed its contempt for the territorial integrity of its neighbours in the cross-border raids, arrests, abductions, and assassinations. South African aggression against the frontline states between 1980 and 1988 cost the lives of more than 750 000 children and adults, with uncounted injuries and maimings, and more than two million refugees, as well as damage in excess of $27 billion (Ling in Turok, 1990:7-8). During the 1980s the security forces invaded Lesotho, Botswana, Mozambique, Angola, Swaziland, Zimbabwe and Zambia. The security forces backed rebel groups in Angola and Mozambique, disrupted the oil supply of Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, and the railway connections of Angola, Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Brittain in Harker, 1994:46).

Attacks on political exiles who had relocated to the neighbouring states became common. Parcel bombs were a favoured method of liquidating prominent activists, among them the Black Consciousness student leader Tiro, who was based in Botswana. Oswald Mtshali's "Abram Ongkoepoetse Tiro, a young black martyr" (1980:31) captures the anger and the quest for retaliation that the assassination generated:

> Memories will linger longer
> than all the flaccid denials of guilt
> when dastard deeds are done;
> this decaying world will
> hobble on its scabby feet
> to an ignominous end,
> leaving behind an acrid dust of hatred
> and flames raging for vengeance.

Parcel bombs were sent to other frontline states as well. The prominent opponent of the regime, Ruth First, was killed in Mozambique in August 1982. Sankie Nkondo's poem "For You Ruth" (1990:50-5) is dedicated to her memory.

Jenny Curtis Schoon, the former National Union of South African Students' activist, was killed with her child in Angola. Chris Mann's poem "In memory of Jeanette Schoon: killed in exile by a parcel bomb" (1990:16), weighs the capacity of words to represent the terrible attack that the activist and her child endured:

But language, its close-knit fabric of words,
which speaks with ease of precious, humdrum things
... language is ripped,
the threads dangling, by such a smashing
blast, can only gesture, patchily, at a
room in shambles, the rafters smoking, freak-
mangled chairs, the hair-tufts, flesh
-bits, your infant's...
Not grief, Jeanette, some sort of remembrance
is all you'd ask, a woman of privilege
who spoke her mind, who never would accept,
in prison or out, how much we humans loathe
to be confronted by our cruelties.

The last few lines pay tribute to her human rights record, contrasting the ideals that inspired such activists with the ideology and tactics of the apartheid regime.

Keith Gottschalk's poem "Elegy to Jenny Schoon" (Coetzee and Willemse, 1989:87-88) uses blunt irony to challenge the state's standard denial of culpability for a host of parcel bombings, when it was well known that it regularly tampered with the mail of activists:

in Pretoria

parcels address themselves
to the problems of the day:
Mnr Ongopotse Tiro, Gaberone
Mnr John Dube, Lusaka
Mev Ruth First, Maputo
Mev Jenny Schoon, Lubango

all wrapped up,
all delivered.

The Afrikaans form of address Gottschalk uses is intended to reflect the source of the parcel bombs, the apartheid regime. However, it emerged at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that the special branch operative responsible for the bombs that were sent to Jenny Schoon and to Ruth First was not an Afrikaner but the English-speaking Major Craig Williamson (1997).

The parcel bombs were part of a range of attacks on the frontline states. Dikobe wa Mogale's poem "waking up: 09-12-1982" (1984:56-8) captures the horror of one of the death squad raids that were conducted with impunity throughout the 1980s:

the screams of men and women
dying in blood-soaked dreams
of handgrenades
machinegun fire

and the total strategy
embrace of death

The attacks on Botswana from 1985 to 1989 represent the standard practice of the security forces towards frontline states:

> there were 20 direct SADF attacks or sabotages, 37 lesser incidents involving incursions or cross-border shootings, and 23 known air-space violations - the largest number of recorded incidents involving South African troops against any Frontline State in that period, except for Angola. After the third of these attacks, on 14 June 1985, in which twelve people were killed and six injured, the SADF chief, General Constand Viljoen, claimed that every effort had been made "to get at the enemy." Ten South Africans died, and "almost all were refugees" (Johnson and Martin, 1989:101).

One of the security force raids into Botswana resulted in the killing of Thami Mnyele, the artist and founding member of the Medu Art Ensemble. The worsening situation necessitated the departure of exiled activists and artists such as the poet Wally Serote and the novelist Mandla Langa for Europe. Activists were still vulnerable at that distance: Dulcie September was shot dead in Paris in 1988.

The role of the South African army in Namibia was even worse. Namibia, which had been colonized by Germany, had fallen into South Africa's grasp during the first world war. Over the years South Africa strengthened its grip on Namibia, because of its mineral wealth and its strategic value as a buffer zone. In the late 1970s the apartheid regime spent R1-million a day protecting its interests in defiance of a long-standing United Nations' resolution calling for the independence of Namibia.

In 1978 South African planes bombed a South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) refugee camp at Kassinga (in Southern Angola) for twelve hours: 600 people, including children, were killed and over a thousand were wounded. Two hundred people were taken captive. Through military censorship most of the activities of the SADF were concealed from South Africans. The academic and poet Kelwyn Sole worked in Namibia in the late 1970s. His long poem "Ovamboland" (1987a:20-32) conveys the experiences of ordinary Namibians under South African domination:

Suddenly there's a
-SCREAM- of tearing paper
through the sky, and one Mirage,
no two, Three! cleave
the air at tree-top height
in tight formation,
arrows of death, arrows of portent
directly overhead

The presence of the South African Defence Force, despite its propaganda, was not merely intimidatory, as Sole reveals through a Namibian commentator:

The army, the headman says,
has taken to noting
those villages they think
feed the swapo's

plant landmines
under bushes in the area,
carefully smooth over
the disturbed earth

and strew the ground with sweets

In the ironic poem "Developing the Nation" (1987a:15-17) Sole offers insights into the resistance that the brutal rule catalysed:

A history of flung rocks and bullets.
The desert was slowly made to
blood. Years of poverty...
Now the moon lights the hands of comrades.
... their home
an occupied ruin in which they thirst for freedom,
old men and children raising fists...
Change comes with every spade's turn
freedom will come
when the small person stands up
no tyrant can prevail

Although such truisms sound pitiful against the might of the colonizer, the SADF's repressive actions in Namibia generated outrage on the part of other subjected people in the region. Among the oppressed in South Africa there was strong solidarity with the struggle of the Namibian people, as Mzwake Mbuli's poem "Change is Pain" (1989:26-7) suggests:

I have been to Oshakati and Ovamboland;
Pain and tears was their story

The South African regime's support for reactionary forces in pre- and post-independence Zimbabwe was clearer than its involvement in most of the remaining frontline states. Less conspicuous but equally indisputable was the security forces' involvement in the mysterious circumstances of Samora Machel's aeroplane crash in South African territory in 1986.

Events in Angola were to prove critical to changes in South Africa. The SADF first invaded Angola in 1975, the year of its independence. It aided and abetted the Unita rebel movement in a destabilisation move against the MPLA government, just as it (together with the Smith regime) had fostered Renamo to destabilise the Frelimo government in Mozambique. Towards the end of 1988 (after the United States' government had pledged support of Unita leader Jonas Savimbi) the South African army intervened openly to prevent the defeat of Unita in south-eastern Angola. Darrell Roodt's film *The Stick* depicts the war psychosis that fueled the barbarous behaviour of the South African troops "on the border".

Forced into fighting the South African army in a conventional war, Angola defended itself successfully. Despite a six-month offensive that involved at least 10 000 troops, the invading South African army suffered a significant defeat in Cuito Cunavale in 1988. Cuban troops, who had arrived to support the Angolans, drove the South African army back to the Namibian border (Holness in Turok, 1990:50-53; Ling in Turok, 1990:7). Despite a propaganda and censorship campaign to conceal the SADF's presence in Angola from South Africans, the resounding defeat could not be kept out of the media, which showed the returning body bags. This had a significant effect on morale on both sides of the political divide in South Africa. It was also a critical factor in the progress towards Namibian independence. These processes also cleared the way for the negotiated settlement in South Africa.

3.3 Internal repression

> The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight (Benjamin, 1973:259).

Unwilling and incapable of addressing the aspirations of the majority of South Africans, the unrepresentative government developed a culture of repression over the decades to enable it to maintain supremacy. The National Party government was in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, eg., clauses that were systematically breached were Article 5: "No-one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment"; and Article 9: "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile."

The costs of repression have been enormous to the victims, as well as to the perpetrators and their beneficiaries:

> South African white society boasted more guns per capita than almost any population in the world; by 1980, over 1.5 million had received firearm licenses, an average of three guns for every four white males in the country (Davis, 1987:137).

Kelwyn Sole's poem "Troyeville/Bertrams" (1987a:74-5) conveys the racially-inspired belligerence that characterised the culture of militarism: "they wore their white skins like a fist". As a result, the majority of people lived under a constant dread of violation, intensified by the irregular role of the police and the army, as James Matthews' poem "I know fear"(Van Wyk, Conradie and Constandaras, 1988:513) records:

I know fear.
Fear is the knock
at the fourth hour after midnight
when the house is hushed in sleep

Resistance to apartheid, as well as more general demands for basic human rights, led to the subjection of many thousands of people to police and army brutality.

The regime's claims that it was subject to a "total onslaught" which it had to repel at all levels was spurious, for the regime itself was illegitimate, and its challengers were South African citizens, whose rights in the matter had been affirmed by the United Nations' General Assembly in 1975 (Asmal, Asmal and Roberts, 1996:184). In 1984 the United Nations' Security Council unanimously resolved that the apartheid government had no authority to represent the people of the country.

The security forces' killing of an innocent schoolboy, which marked the first fatality in the Soweto uprising in 1976, was followed by a characteristic set of responses on the part of the government, as Oswald Mtshali notes in his poem "Hector Peterson - the Young Martyr" (1980:29-30):

Hector Peterson, victim of wanton savagery,
you lay there in rivulets of blood and tears...
a swirling turmoil of black fury rising to a pitch;
then a string of official denials
and feeble assurances,

"There's no crisis in the land,
There's no cause for panic;
We are not guilty!"

The poem shows the government's press statements at the time to have been a cover-up. Black people broke the law just by being alive.

Many opponents of apartheid maintained that civil war had been unleashed upon defenceless people. In a poem written for his daughter, the exiled poet and academic Keorapetse Kgositsile shows that even those forced into exile felt the impact of the state-sponsored violence: "Letter to Ipeleng on her birthday 1976" (Plumpp, 1982:20-1) has the lines

butcher savages practice their orgies
With jackboots, batons, bayonets and bullets.

The exercise of unbridled power over the majority of people formed the basis for their solidarity despite the history of division sown by minority rule.

3.3.1 The security forces

The security forces were the government's arm of repression from the 1960s. By the 1980s South Africa was one of the most policed countries in the world with a security force of just under one million[2], and an operating budget of R8 561 million per year. The regime's policy of *kragdadigheid* (unconquerable power) is seen most clearly in the actions of its ironically-named security forces. The police force consisted of 48 000 people who staffed the security branch, uniformed police, riot squad, special constables ("kitskonstabels"), police reservists, reserve police, special task forces, neighbourhood watches, and railway police. The Defence Force comprised 639 000 persons (*NEA*, 1988, Appendix A:i-xi).

By serving the interests of the governing minority the vast security forces constituted the most significant threat to the welfare of the majority of the population. The might of the security force was strengthened by the battery of laws that prevented the collection or publication of information regarding the security forces. In such a context one of the few discourses in which resistance could be articulated was poetry. The power of the state, as well as its subjective construction of criminality, is conveyed in Peter Horn's poem "The police are looking for somebody" (1991:73):

> The police are looking for somebody
> he incited the people to demand better jobs and equal pay
> the police are combing the high schools for somebody...
> the police have brought their Alsatian dogs with them
> to find the man who screamed: "No racism! No colonialism!"
> the police have surrounded the block where somebody lives
> who yelled: "Stop working! Strike!"
>
> Somebody hopes to reach the border tonight

The poem shows how demands for basic rights were criminalised by the apartheid state as it acted to entrench its domination.

3.3.2 The effects of repression on family and loved ones

From the early 1970s the youth emerged as the boldest front of resistance. Children and youth bore the brunt of the regime's reprisals. Almost a generation later, in 1986, the youth were still in the frontline, with 8 800 children detained, some as young as 9 years old. From mid-1986 to mid-1987 there were 10 000 detainees under the age of 18 (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:125, 135-6). During the succession of states of emergency, children comprised almost half of the total of 50 000 detainees (*Weekly Mail*, 8.6.90:6).

The lives of the children of activists were often seriously affected by the struggle, and particularly by the assassination of parents, as in the case of the children of Griffiths and Victoria Mxenge, Florence and Fabian Ribeiro, Ruth First, Rick Turner and many others. In 1978, when she was very young, Jann Turner was present when her father Rick Turner, a left-wing academic, was assassinated by forces that were evidently close to the security police (who had already targetted him). Her description of the security police who turned up after the shooting is bold and accusatory in the poem "Now in the Cold Dawn..." (Coetzee and Willemse, 1989:152-155):

> they just brought their cameras and radios and vans and dogs
> striking the house with light
> and hard voices and searching and pulling and picking and pushing
> to find, to see, to know.
> But they can't see with the dark glasses they wear
> can't know with their crippled heads
> can't find with their noseless dogs.
> For the man with the gun walks free away
> soft across the wet grass
> between the policemen who smiled
> and turned to cover you with their blanket

In a series of moving passages that follow she depicts the feelings of desolation that she and her younger sister experienced. The medium of literature seems to enable the rendition of a complex set of emotions and ideas: the shocking political murder of a parent, the re-living of the events, the experience and memory of loss, the need to challenge the system, as well as a sense of the efficacy of solidarity. Turner uses the genre of poetry to yoke diverse experiences: the political and the personal, the private and the public and the individual and the collective:

> You are dead.
> And how the scratching of this dried blood scratches deep in myself
> and the drops on the window are the rain coursing down on my face
> cold and hopeless, for I am numbed
> paralysed,
> helpless...
> So, empty, I watch the dawn
> feel the cold light touch my skin.
> And I see that we wear the scars of fighters.
> Suddenly, clearly I know
> the sun must rise to light our pain
> for we are not alone in our hurting, our incomprehension
> we are not alone in our anger
> we are bound, we burn together with strength
> with our wild fury
> and so I, scarred with my father's blood,
> I know what I must fight.

These lines document a later generation's recognition of the necessity for a united struggle if the state was to be vanquished. While Rick Turner had been concerned that his students became involved in the struggles of the oppressed, it was his death that taught his young child the same lesson. Her words convey the recognition that the only way beyond personal abjection under such circumstances is for oppressed people to work together.

The children of activists who were systematically persecuted over long periods by the state were also affected psychologically. The despair that resulted from such experiences is conveyed in the poem "Women" by Zinzi Mandela (1989:29). Like the children of most political prisoners, she experienced the disruption of family life caused first by the clandestine political work and then by the long incarceration of her father, Nelson Mandela. Later, as a teenager, she shared the shock and degradation of her mother's banishment by the regime to the isolated Brandfort. Her speaker articulates despair and a sense of worthlessness:

> My life is but a dirty penny
> that is only valued because
> it is the only one
>
> My life is but a ten rand note
> that can be used only because
> there may be change

The second stanza suggests that only hope for the possibility of political change motivates her to continue to struggle in the begrudged coin of her life. The image suggests the position of women as objects, and shows a street-wise sense that she too has to use herself as an object, to have any hope of deliverance from the debasement that defines her. The trauma expressed in the poem is clarified by research that indicates that 5 million adults (ie., 23% of the population) have experienced a disturbing event, such as being physically attacked, or some other life threatening incident (*NHS*, 1991:101), as is succintly captured in Serote's "Modes of Introits from Familiar Sights" (1978:85-86):

> we know how
> we have been related to violent obliterations

Research also suggests that 34% of South Africans have experienced symptoms of anxiety and depression. The effects of violence have also been felt by the close associates of victims (*NHS*, 1995:101). The high incidence of traumatic stress suggests that the depth of oppression is matched only by the breadth of oppression.

About 76% of township residents reported experiencing sleep disturbances due to the politically-related violence (*Weekend Mail*, 22 June 1990:17). Boitumelo Makhema expresses a mother's perspective of the toll in "A Mother's Cry 2" (Lockett, 1990:233-4):

> How can I live being a mother
> with dreams of family reunions
> When my children are swept by the whirlwind day and night...
>
> I remember their father who is on the island

their uncle who is dead
their aunt who is confined
their sister who is banished
I think of myself who is
left alone to weep and mourn

In a highly patriarchal, racist and class-divided society the effect of the political violence on poor and defenceless African women has been severe.

In 1981 Griffiths Mxenge was brutally killed. He was a leading human rights lawyer together with his wife Victoria Mxenge. Police failure to make any progress in finding his killers fuelled suspicions that the security forces were involved. Mxenge had worked on many political cases, including those of Mapetla Mohapi and Joseph Mdluli, both of whom had died in detention. In 1989 Dirk Coetzee, a leader of a security force death squad, admitted responsibility for Mxenge's death. Others involved in the killing were Butana Almond Nofomela, Joe Mamasela, and Brian Nqulunga (who was subsequently murdered by his own death squad). Coetzee revealed that Brigadier Van der Houwen of the Port Natal region had instructed the operation, while Mamasela, the leader of the operation, has spoken of having been briefed by the Durban security police (*Truth Commission Report*, SABC 1, 12.5.96).[3]

When Dirk Coetzee talked about the death squads (that had been created in 1979) to the *Vrye Weekblad* newspaper in 1989, he was dismissed as a liar by the Attorney-General of Natal, Tim McNally, and the Harms' Commission. This was despite the corroboration of death squad member Almond Nofomela's earlier testimony (Nofomela had provided the first real evidence of the existence of death squads). As a result, Eugene de Kock took over where Dirk Coetzee left off, and De Kock's death squad were given medals and other rewards for their activities.

Coetzee revealed that the security forces plotted to create the impression that the ANC was responsible for Mxenge's death. The assassination of Mxenge was intended to serve two purposes: to liquidate a powerful opponent of the state, and to sow division among the resistance forces. Ben J. Langa, a KwaZulu-Natal activist, wrote an untitled poem dealing with political activists who were slain. In a strangely prescient parallel Langa focused on Griffiths Mxenge's brutal assassination:

the son of the soil lay on the soggy grounds
his blood
washed into the soil
in final enactment
of his belongingness to the earth
the final
marriage
and return in soul
and blood to the land he loved
so dearly
(Frederickse, 1986:124-5)

In 1984 Ben Langa was himself shot dead. He was another victim of a "dirty tricks" campaign of agents of the state. *Agents provocateurs*, who were police agents, had circulated rumours that the student activist was a government spy. Acting on the rumour, two *Umkhonto we Sizwe* cadres murdered Langa. They were arrested, convicted and received the death sentence. As with the disinformation surrounding Griffiths Mxenge's killing, the orchestration of Ben Langa's death was part of the state's strategy to sow dissension, destroy anti-apartheid structures and discredit activists as crazed radicals all at once.

In 1985, when Victoria Mxenge was also assassinated, four years after her husband Griffiths, there were again rumours that she was killed by political rivals. The rumours were intended to exacerbate tensions in the KwaZulu-Natal region. The academic and activist David Webster and his partner, Maggie Friedman clarified the political significance of such assassinations in an article they wrote a few weeks before he was himself assassinated:

> Assassinations have the effect of controlling opposition when all other methods, such as detention or intimidation, have failed. It is very rare that such assassinations are solved (1989:39).

The last sentence of their assertion is beginning to be challenged in Webster's own case: ongoing Truth and Reconciliation Commission's investigations have confirmed suspicions that he was also a death squad victim.

The clearest argument that connects the assassinations to the state's determination to hang on to power was made by Eugene de Kock, the death squad commander involved in most of the killings:

> The National Party can't say they didn't know what was going on. They didn't stay in power because the majority of the people supported them. They were in power because of people like me (Asmal, Asmal and Roberts, 1996:74).

Innocent families suffered in the war that was unleashed upon them by the National Party government, not least of whom were the Ntuli family who were gunned down during a wake in KwaMakhuta in 1987. At the 1996 trial of Magnus Malan (who was the Minister of Defence at the time of the attack), the reason for the killings emerged: the death squad had been frustrated at not capturing their quarry, the activist Victor Ntuli. (The Malan case was eventually dismissed, owing to serious flaws in the prosecution conducted by the Attorney-General of KwaZulu-Natal, Tim McNally.)

Just as activists made the ultimate sacrifice for their political beliefs, personal relationships were also sacrificed for political commitment. One poem which tries to render the connection between the personal and the political is Farouk Asvat's "And the night" (Finn and Gray, 1992:130-2), which shows the precariousness of personal relationships that were subject to the political imperatives of the police state:

> But do not go
> Do not go my love
> Stay
> Stay while the night is persistent

And men in safaris
Keep coming and going
And men with bloody knives
Keep going and coming

Jeremy Cronin's untitled poem, beginning "Faraway city, there" (1983:71) is a love poem addressed to his wife and created in the isolation of prison. It supports and engages the feminist argument that the personal is inseparable from the political:

There in our Cape Town where
they're smashing down homes
of the hungry, labouring people
-will you wait for me, my love?
... Defiant, frightened, broken,
and unbreakable are the people of our city.

-Will you wait for me, my love?

For many activists, the personal was as much political as it was communal. *Inside* (1983), the collection in which "Faraway city, there" appeared, was published when Cronin was released after his seven-year sentence for charges under the Terrorism Act in 1983. The unexpected death of his wife during his prison term is captured in the poem "I saw your mother" (1983:77), which simultaneously conveys his forlorn personal state (the poem is addressed to his deceased wife) and his political commitment:

I saw your mother
with two guards
through a glass plate
for one quarter hour
on the day that you died.

"Extra visit, special favour"
I was told, and warned
"The visit will be stopped
if politics is discussed.
Verstaan - understand!?"
on the day that you died.

Another of Cronin's poems that shows the complex connection between the personal and the political is "Walking on Air" (1983:5-14). The poem examines the conflicting loyalties that a long-term political prisoner has to address. John Matthews was pressurised by the security police to betray his comrades in return for a quick release. He gets the police to fetch his wife ("Dulcie, she's not political at all") so that he can tell her of his decision:

John Matthews
got led out to his wife, and holding her hand,
they let him hold her hand, he said
-Do you know why they've brought you?

And she said
-I do.
And he said
-Dulcie, I will never betray my comrades.
And with a frog in her throat she replied
-I'm behind you. One hundred percent.

Cronin's poem celebrates the quiet heroism of two ordinary people who, despite the price they would pay for his refusal to expose his comrades, chose simply to protect them, and still managed to maintain common cause with each other despite the coercive behaviour of the security police. Dulcie and John Matthews managed a complicated balance between the personal and the political with a grace that was more than equal to the contending pressures.

Even in exile, personal relationships were often secondary to the struggle. Zinjiva Winston Nkondo (also known as Victor Matlou), who worked in different parts of the continent for the ANC's mission in exile, addresses the loneliness of prolonged absence in his poem "It can grow dark here" (1990:41-4). He begins with the words "Dear Comrade Wife", and in the poem as well as in the dedication of the anthology he demonstrates the love and comradeship between himself and his wife, Sankie Nkondo, despite the distances between them and the rigours of their separate lives in exile.[4] When Zinjiva Nkondo was seized and taken back to South Africa by the security forces, Sankie Nkondo wrote the poem "Horror of this absence" (1990:41-4), an expression of solidarity and trepidation for his welfare:

I know it is lonely in that icy horizon
exposing your flesh to ravenous hyenas
dying to set the clock of events to digit zero

3.3.3 Attacks on townships: "the tyranny of place"

In the 1980s many townships revolted against a range of problems that included large-scale unemployment, the rising cost of living, poor or non-existent services and amenities (such as electricity and tarred roads), rent and service fee increases, the imposition of government-created municipal councils, and a harsh and inadequate education system (Haysom, 1986:278-89).

Mafika Gwala's poem "My house is bugged" (1982:39) is both a serious and a comic expression of the pervasive unease that had long characterised the townships. Mpumalanga, the Hammarsdale township in which he has lived, paid dearly for its long resistance to incorporation into the KwaZulu homeland. Lamontville is another Natal township with a long history of organised resistance to incorporation into the KwaZulu bantustan. In December

1982, Lamontville residents began a bus boycott against fare increases, as did other townships such as Klaarwater, Claremont, St Wendolins, Kwadabeka, and Kranskloof. This was the first united action that these townships undertook (Mshengu, Ndlovu and Fairbairn, 1992:53). The slogans that defined their position were "*Asinamali! Azikhwelwa!*" (We have no money! We will not ride!), which recall the famous Alexandra bus boycott in 1957.

In Mbongeni Ngema's *Asinamali* (1985), the character Bhoyi Ngema tells of his involvement in the boycotts:

> We printed and distributed pamphlets. In two months we had Lamontville in our hands. Then Chesterville, and the Indian community around Durban. Our target was the whole of South Africa in two years.

Owing to the resolve and solidarity of members of the community the boycott lasted 18 months in Lamontville. Msizi Dube, the leader of the boycott, was also a community councillor. This was a position that was usually spurned by activists because the state used such structures to co-opt black lackeys. But Dube, who had been imprisoned on Robben Island, had a reputation as a formidable organizer who worked hard to build democratic structures.

Not long after the bus boycott began, the rents were suddenly increased: in 1982 Lamontville residents faced a 63% rent hike (Price, 1991:171). Dube was active in the organisation established to fight the rent increases. *Asinamali* (1985) elaborates on the reasons for the rent boycott. Msizi Dube is reported by Bhoyi Ngema to have declared: "Because of low wages we have no money, and cannot afford the high rent increase" (1985). This clarifies the complex articulation of oppression, poverty and resistance. Later in the play, the community's determination is clear in Bhoyi Ngema's declaration: "We don't only have no money, but we refuse to get out of the matchbox houses they have given us" (1985).

In April 1983 Dube decided that it was futile to remain on the council and announced his intention to resign. He was shot dead the same night.[5] As *Asinamali* shows, far from quelling the resistance of township residents, the assassination of Msizi Dube increased their determination, and the rent boycott continued in Lamontville, and spread across the country.

In September 1984 the Botha government implemented a new constitution which, like previous the constitution, was racially based. "It totally excluded the African majority, though it provided a measure of representation for those Coloured and Indian people prepared to collaborate" (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:124). Fewer than 15% of Coloureds and 12% of Indians actually participated in the election that followed, and some of the Indian votes had apparently been cast by people who were dead. The low polls in the Coloured and Indian houses were attributable to the government's lack of credibility. "Provoked by government intransigence posing as reform, and by living conditions made intolerable by economic hard times" (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:124), people across the country rose in rebellion. The government banned meetings, harassed activists, detained more than twenty United Democratic Front leaders, and spread misinformation and propaganda. The government's dependence on repression to maintain control increased, particularly in the townships that defied the grudging reform tactics (ie., the referendum, the new constitution and the tricameral elections) that were intended to obscure the absence of transformation. The Vaal

Triangle townships erupted, and unpopular mayors and councillors were challenged to resign, some were killed, and some had their homes petrol-bombed. The protests spread across the country as township residents rejected rent increases and undemocratic councils and raised other local grievances. Then the state moved into the townships.

In a predawn manoeuvre in October 1984, 7 000 soldiers and police cordoned off Sebokeng in what was called an "anti-crime" operation, at 4H00. This method of intimidation became the general pattern in other rebellious townships. "Soldiers fueled rather than calmed resistance," and some "32 000 troops had been deployed in ninety-six townships" (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:131). In *Asinamali* (1985), Solomzi Bisholo describes developments in Sebokeng from the point of view of an impressionable youth:

> You know those guys came with Hippos, Saracens, Casspirs, Spiders, Thunderchariots. It was like in the movies! It was like the whole township was full of dust, smoke and fire. Children, old men, old women, women with babies on their backs.

A more sombre perspective of the nature of security force activity in the civil war that was beginning to develop in the Pietermaritzburg townships is captured in Dikobe wa Mogale's "poem for sobantu" (1984:43):

> against the terror whizz of bullets
> against the terror of batons, sjamboks
> and alsatian dogs
> there is terror and destruction
> in sobantu village
> shattered window panes and
> gutted-smouldering buildings
> complement tenement doors
> kicked off their hinges
> during house to house searches

Across the country tensions were escalating. In March 1985, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre, 20 people were shot dead by police in an unprovoked attack at Langa near Uitenhage, and 50 people were wounded (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:131)[6].

Among the scores of activists who disappeared in abductions were Stanza Bopape, Sicelo Dhlomo, the PEBCO (Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organization) leaders Sipho Hashe, Champion Galela and Qaqawula Godolozi, and Siphiwo Mthimkulu who had been poisoned by the police, released, and then abducted by them. The Soweto playwright Peter Ngwenya developed the play *Where is my son*, to highlight the frequency and implications of such occurrences. At the time of the countrywide wave of abductions legal forms of protest and organising were being curtailed:

> the devastating security measures taken against the UDF [United Democratic Front] had forced it to function virtually underground, despite the fact that it was still entirely legal (Collinge, 1986:265).

The disappearance of the "PEBCO 3" in May 1985 had a sequel in the former Vlakplaas operative Joe Mamasela's admission at the Eugene de Kock trial in January 1996 that he and some security branch officers, who were members of abduction and death squad, had tortured them to death. It has since emerged (in amnesty applications at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) that security force policemen abducted, tortured and killed them, and then burnt, hacked and dumped their bodies in the Fish River.[7]

In June 1985 four Cradock leaders Matthew Goniwe, Sparrow Mkhonto, Fort Calata and Sicelo Mhlauli were ambushed, tortured, and burnt, and a month later, their mutilated and charred bodies were found. On the evening of their mass funerals, on 21 July 1985, P.W. Botha announced the imposition of a state of emergency, under the Public Safety Act (which like the titles of other apartheid legislation represents equivocation to the point of irony). Through the state of emergency the power of the security forces increased significantly:

> The emergency regulations gave the South African Defence Force (SADF) and police unrestrained powers, as well as virtually indemnity from prosecution. An 18-year old national serviceman could use "whatever force he thinks necessary" to stop anyone from "endangering public safety." Without a warrant or higher authorization, he could detain and imprison for fourteen days anyone he thought could endanger law and order, or search any person, vehicle, or premises and any article he believed could be used for any offenses. If the Minister of Law and Order thought they had acted in good faith, no one could bring criminal or civil proceedings against any member of the SADF, the police, or government. The commissioner of police was given far-reaching discretionary powers. He could impose curfews, control the publication of news relating to the State of Emergency or the conduct of the security forces, and place restrictions on funerals (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:132).

Kelwyn Sole's poem "Celebration" (1987a:82-3) offers a psychological portrait of the calibre of the security police deployed in the townships:

> the police arrive in the morning
> grown children with brutal faces
> to celebrate their anxiety with murder
> their paranoid mothers with murder
> wringing their hands
> that milk the nipple of a trigger.

The government used the emergency to crush progressive organisations. Special restrictions were issued to stop political meetings, campaigns and funerals. Those activists from areas where resistance was strongest had to flee or go into hiding. Those who did not were quickly targetted by the security forces. One of the casualties was Victoria Mxenge who was gunned down outside her home, in front of her young children. The well-known Durban lawyer, UDF official, and widow of the slain Griffiths Mxenge had just returned from officiating at the funerals of the Cradock Four. The townships in the Durban area exploded. In the two weeks after her death seventy people died. No arrests were made in the Mxenge and related killings. Other leaders were abducted, and some of their homes were petrol bombed. UDF leaders and

the leaders of its affiliates were particularly hard hit, with the state using detentions to cripple the organisation and trials to criminalise it. Most of the remaining UDF executive members were forced into hiding, through threats of detention or threats against themselves or their families (Collinge, 1986:265). In August 1985, the UDF leader Trevor Manuel wrote:

> Two-thirds of our national and regional executive members are out of action through death, detention or trial. At least 2000 rank-and-file members of the UDF are in detention (Saul and Gelb, 1986:222).

While most of the country awaited decisive reforms that would improve the situation, P.W. Botha's "Rubicon" speech, delivered in Durban in August 1985, was an anti-climax, in that none of the important reforms that had been anticipated materialized. Instead Botha rejected the concerns of the international community and took a belligerent stance towards the ANC. The rand collapsed and the internal war intensified.

During 1985 more than ten thousand people had been detained during the first six months of emergency rule. About 800 people died in the violence, and 66% of the deaths were caused by the police (Webster and Friedman, 1989:21,22,34; Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:131). There were numerous allegations of police and army atrocities. A South African Catholic Bishops' Conference report stated that "the police are now regarded by many people in the Black townships as disturbers of the peace and perpetrators of violent crime" (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:131).

The resulting chaos and the hounding and removal of leadership contributed to the increase in violence. Faced with the intransigence of an illegitimate and brutal regime, the youth in particular tended to be defiant and careless in their determination to secure change. The actions of some undisciplined comrades alienated township residents. Conservative elements seized the opportunity to mobilise, and soon vigilante forces began to operate with impunity in many communities (NEA, 1988:9). Many of the vigilante groups had clear links with the security forces, eg., the Mbokodo in KwaNdebele, the Three Million Gang in Kroonstad, the Black Cats in Ermelo and the Witdoeke in Crossroads. The state exploited the divisions and destruction they caused, recognising them as a significant threat to the development of unity among the oppressed. Other vigilante gangs that were used by the security establishment (and organized by them) were Solomzi and Amabutho.[8] The situation exemplifies Gramsci's description of the diversity of morbid symptoms in the interregnum: while the old refuses to die, the new struggles to come into being (Forgacs and Nowell-Smith, 1985:276).

As conditions deteriorated, the security forces behaved with increasing impunity. This is clear in the "Trojan Horse" incident which occurred in Athlone township in October 1985. Athlone residents had put up barricades on streets to impede the security force patrols that were terrorising the townships. Some children were in the vicinity of the barricades when the policemen came by, concealed in wooden crates on the back of an open-bed railway truck. The police fired shot-guns without issuing any warnings and three boys were killed. Peter Horn's poem "Canto Twelve: Trojan Horses" (1991:122) is dedicated to one of the children, Michael Miranda, who was 11 years old, while Deelah Khan's poem "Black Monday" (Coetzee and Willemse, 1989:111) tries to represent the community's perspective of the event:

> Death swept through our roads in lorry-loads.
> The shots of shame skulked in crates
> and waited...
> they waited.
>
> Brakes screeched, the air stifled
> and smothered.
> Gun shots

In reaction to the international outcry to this and other security force atrocities the government claimed that their security forces had lowered the level of violence in the townships. But, as Max Coleman and David Webster attested, during

> the 10 months prior to the state of emergency, the politically-related death rate ran at 1,5 per day. After the declaration of the emergency, it rose to 3,5 per day, giving lie to ministerial claims (1986:126).

3.3.4 "Total onslaught"

> Systematic raids by police and army on all centres of protest and resistance... are part of an ongoing civil war. So too is the continued wave of bannings of organizations and detentions of people dedicated to peaceful political activity against apartheid. (Wilson and Ramphele, 1989:5-6).

The apartheid regime relied on the violence and the terror of its forces to destabilise and weaken the resistance before it would begin to negotiate the future of the country. In the final years of terror there were shootings, bombings, burglaries, arson, bricks lobbed through windows, assault, pigs heads, dead cats and slashed tyres. The campaigns waged by the clandestine third force commandos were part of the government's "total strategy" package, which included both "reform" and repression:

> Every institution of white power from the National Party to the corporate boardroom to the editorial desk to the defense force would be tied into the controls of the State Security Council. While shutting down channels of rebellion, Pretoria would open doors to reform. Ultimately, violent resistance would be forced into political irrelevance as blacks realized the advantages of dialogue and the futility of warfare. [But] the ruling elite proved [unable] to initiate reforms substantial enough to deter rebellion (Davis, 1987:201-2).

In mid-1986 the Commonwealth Eminent Persons' Group, which represented forty-nine nations, was rebuffed when it tried to break the political deadlock. Rejecting international involvement and refusing to recognise the popular nature of the resistance movement, the government set out to restructure local politics and to annihilate the opposition. Rather than discuss internationally supervised elections, P.W. Botha dismissed attempts at mediation and sent hit squads against ANC targets in the neighbouring states. On the tenth anniversary of the Soweto uprising the state of emergency was reimposed and extended in scope:

> the 1985/6 emergency was tame compared to the one declared on 12 June 1986. The second emergency was better planned, more harshly implemented, and gave virtually a free rein to the army and police. In contrast to the first emergency, it was applied to every region of the country. Emergency rule reflected the total dominance of the security forces within the state. In time, it also revealed their total inability to provide any solutions, other than naked terror and repression, to the crisis facing the country (Baskin, 1991:134-5).

Within ten days of this emergency 10 000 activists were detained. Within a year the number rose to 30 000. Over 50% of this number were held for more than a month. Some 10 000 detainees under the age of 18 and 3 000 were women (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:135). Mavis Taylor and a group of University of Cape Town drama students attempted to get around the gagging of reportage and analysis by producing the play *Thina Bantu*, which was based on the brutal rape and murder of a young black woman by three national servicemen. *Thina Bantu* examined the destructive effect of the ideology of militarisation on impressionable young men, who were made all the more susceptible after years of apartheid education and religious indoctrination (*New Nation*, 9.10.86:11; 21.1.88:11).

The sexual assault of detainees was common, as attested to by the secretary of the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference and member of the South African Communist Party, Father Smangaliso Mkatshwa, whose calling did not protect him from being severely tortured through the administration of electrical shocks (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:135-6).[9] Less well documented, until special Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings in 1996, was the widespread rape and sexual assault of women detainees.

In a 1987 survey of human rights across the world, David Webster and Maggie Friedman noted that "South Africa features sixth from bottom of a list of 89 countries, scoring only 22% on a scale of human rights" (1989:16). Even countries with a tradition of repression had a better record, such as "Chile with a rate of 35%", while "South Africa is left rubbing shoulders with Rumania and Libya" (1989:16).

The election scheduled for 6 May 1987 was a challenge to the democratic movement. The white electorate was asked by P.W.Botha to support the government's reform moves and its security action aimed at crushing the democratic movement, which he referred to as "communist subversion". In response to the democratic movement's call for a stayaway on 5 and 6 May 1987 about 2,5 million people across the country stayed away from work and school.

With each successive state of emergency the level of repression escalated as the state grew more sophisticated in its methods of repression. To obscure its central role in the conflict the

government used the racial, ethnic and tribal stereotypes it had developed. By 1987 and 1988 most of the deaths in township violence were no longer linked directly to the police, as before, but were due to what government commentators (and the "mainstream" media) called "black-on-black" violence (Webster and Friedman, 1989:34). Much of the violence was initiated by right-wing vigilantes who enjoyed the protection and resources of shadowy wings of the security forces, and of the cabinet.[10] In this way the state tried to create the impression that the black community was destroying itself, and that the security forces were playing a peacekeeping role between destructive black factions. Dirty tricks' campaigns, which assumed the form of attacks launched by one resistance organisation upon another or its leaders, were part of the state's arsenal to undermine and destroy its opposition.

Many detainees endured solitary confinement, which was a favoured tactic of the security police, to make them more compliant during the interrogation process. The effects of solitary confinement are addressed by Mzwakhe Mbuli in his popular poem "Alone" (1989a:41-2), which is based on the six months of solitary confinement that he experienced in 1988:

> Alone all alone
> One hundred and seventy-six days
> One hundred and seventy-six nights
> In solitary confinement
> Alone all alone.
>
> Perhaps like God on the day of creation
> Alone all alone
> Perhaps like an animal inside the cage
> Alone all alone.

Solitary confinement constitutes one of the most acute forms of oppression, but, in response, the poem "Alone" registers a fierce resistance. The impact of the poem may be judged from the way it was taken up and chanted by the crowds at Mbuli's concerts and at political rallies (*New Nation*, 28.7.88:15; 29.9.89:17), in defiance of the repressive isolation that is its subject:

> Alone in a solitary cell alone
> Alone in a solitary corner alone
> Alone in solitary confusion alone
> Alone in solitary conversation alone
> Yes alone in solitary combat
> Against solitary confinement
> Alone all alone.

The suffering and psychological damage occasioned by the various states of emergency has been considerable. Emergency detentions aimed to crush individuals psychologically, and detainees have suffered ongoing psychosomatic ailments such as sleeplessness and depression. Many Emergency detainees were tortured: studies by the National Medical and Dental Association and the University of Cape Town Institute of Criminology put the figure at more than 80% (*Weekly Mail*, 8.6.90:6). The commonplace nature of torture in South Africa is depicted by Kelwyn Sole in the satirical poem "Fish Tank" (1987a:52-3):

in the darkness of the prison
now and tomorrow
they are busy opening up
a human being like a can of beans
for the safety of the state

This, as well as the general climate of civil war that prevailed, accounts for the widespread manifestation of post-traumatic stress disorders.

In a comprehensive onslaught in 1988, the state used a battery of legal mechanisms to crush its opposition: detentions, restrictions, listings, deportations and the bannings of persons, gatherings and organisations. In February 1988 restrictions were imposed on 33 organisations, and 17 organisations were prohibited from all activities. The organisations included the Detainees Parents' Support Committee, National Education Crisis Committee, National Education Union of South Africa, Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation, South African Youth Congress, South African National Students' Committee, Soweto Youth Congress, and the United Democratic Front. By using the emergency regulations to restrict these organisations, the government circumvented the judicial system. It did not have to supply reasons for the restrictions, nor could the banning orders be reviewed by the Chief Justice. This was a cynical manoeuvre by the state, for it used the emergency regulations to prevent ordinary citizens and organisations from recourse to the law, while simultaneously monopolising the courts to criminalise its opposition. Mzwakhe Mbuli's poem "Why Tricks Not Solutions" (1989a:77-8) sums up the response of many activists and their long-suffering communities to the state's witchhunts and dirty tricks:

When solutions are gone
Tricks cannot become solutions and substitutes
When solutions are gone
Heads cannot be buried deep in the sand
Yes, tricks also delay
The termination of the state of emergency.

The bull is dying at last
The bull is kicking at random at last
Kicking indiscriminately without techniques
Yes, the bull sees its end at last
When solutions are over
Hopeless, helpless totalitarian regimes
Fabricate propaganda too blatant to swallow

The state prosecuted scores of activists on charges of treason, terrorism, membership and furtherance of the aims of banned organizations, attendance of illegal gatherings, and so on. Several community leaders were accused of plotting to overthrow the state by making the townships ungovernable, or of conspiracy with the African National Congress, eg., the Delmas trial which took three years, was preceded by lengthy pre-trial detentions that kept senior UDF leaders and other community and civic leaders out of action for several years. At the outcome of the trial, five of the twenty-two accused (including the general secretary and the publicity officer of the UDF) received lengthy sentences.

Across the country the siege of the townships was accompanied by attempts, in carefully selected townships, to lower the level of resistance by winning hearts and minds. Thirty-four black townships had been identified as "high-risk" security areas in 1986. The security forces strategised the resumption of control through the process of repression and selective upgrading (Boraine, 1989:111). Alexandra was one of the townships that was targetted. The state did not let the fact that it had no case against Moses Mayekiso and other Alexandra Action Committee leaders prevent it from charging them with treason for attempting to improve the slum. With the community leaders out of the way for several years (the case was dismissed by the court in 1989), the National Security Management System launched a R100 million upgrade in Alexandra. Further, by lavishing favours upon a few townships while the rest were neglected, the state attempted to divide them. Equally cynical tactics were used in Port Elizabeth, with the state only attempting to invoke judicial process against PEBCO (Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organization) activists three years after it had detained them (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:136).

Third force activity extended to bomb blasts at COSATU House (the Johannesburg building that housed the head offices of various unions belonging to the trade union); Khanya Community House (the Cape Town building which housed progressive community organisations and trade unions); and Khotso House (which housed the Johannesburg headquarters of the South African Council of Churches, the Black Sash, and other church and anti-apartheid organisations). Khotso House was mysteriously bombed after church leaders, including Archbishop Tutu, were arrested when they tried to petition parliament (Webster and Friedman, 1989:32). The police, assiduous in harassing activists proved quite unable to conduct successful investigations into the "dirty tricks" that occurred, except to prosecute the anti-apartheid activist Shirley Gunn for the bombing of Khotso House[11]:

> Dynamite at Cosatu house
> Dynamite at Khotso house
> Dynamite at Khanya house
> Dynamite at Mzwakhe house

These lines are from Mzwakhe Mbuli's poem "Why Tricks Not Solutions" (1989a:77-8). So threatening did the state find Mzwakhe Mbuli, the "people's poet", that he suffered ongoing harassment. There were two handgrenade attacks on his Pimville home. The first recording of his poems, "Change is Pain" (which was produced by Shifty Records in 1986), was banned. He was detained, kept in solitary confinement and tortured. In addition, he was twice refused a passport to perform at music festivals in Europe, all for expressing the aspirations of the majority in his music and poetry. In early 1989 he and his wife were arrested for the alleged possession of Russian-made handgrenades, and tried on charges under the Arms and Ammunitions Act (*South*, 18.10.89:10). The case dragged on for two years until the magistrate dismissed it on the grounds of insufficient evidence. Mr T. Veldman's statement accompanying his ruling gave some credence to Mbuli's argument that the explosives were planted by the police when they raided his home:

> I do not rule out the possibility that someone who disliked the couple had sneaked into their house and hidden the grenades so as to implicate them (*New Nation*, 1.3.91:3).

Given the widespread condemnation of detention without trial, the state began to use other methods of repression, such as imposing punitive restrictions on significant individuals and organisations. As a result 657 people who were released from detention under the State of Emergency legislation in 1989 were promptly restricted (*Weekly Mail*, 8.6.90:6). Their restriction orders required them to police themselves. So severe were these orders that many, like Zwelakhe Sisulu and Raymond Suttner, were effectively prohibited from working (Webster and Friedman, 1989:18-19). As Odendaal observed:

> Four states of emergency, each more severe than the last, gave the security forces Draconian powers. South Africa is now virtually under martial law. The security forces have almost unlimited powers and indemnity from prosecution. The courts are powerless to intervene. Indeed they are often seen to be upholding apartheid laws. Newspapers are gagged by strict censorship. Opposition to apartheid has been virtually outlawed. Meetings are banned. Political leaders have been silenced through bannings, jail, and exile (Hill and Harris, 1989:125).

It is estimated that more than 150 activists were assassinated between 1979 and 1988, and no one was apprehended. From September 1984 to about February 1989, over 4000 people, mainly blacks, died in violent incidents: factional struggles accounted for 1848 deaths and 1113 township residents were killed by the security forces (Hill and Harris, 1989:39; 72). In some areas the situation was worse, for instance in the Pietermaritzburg area 622 people died during the political violence between January 1987 and March 1988 (*Weekly Mail*, 22.4.88:10). Incensed at the scale of the terror, Mzwakhe Mbuli challenged the state in the poem "Do not push us too far" (1989:37-8):

> Decades of detentions, killings and forced removals
> Years of patience and hope
> Years gone by to this bitter end of bondage.
>
> "Do not push us too far", so goes the saying
> Suppressing freedom in the name of Law and Order
> The voiceless silenced without a parliament
> Reform implemented by coercion...

However, the net effect of the successive states of emergency was to weaken most progressive organisations and to completely destroy democratic structures in some areas (Webster and Friedman, 1989:17). The Pietermaritzburg-based writer B.M. Tenza's poem "Blessed are the dead" (*Weekly Mail* 22.4.88:10) expresses the hopelessness of many people who had suffered and who continued to live in fear:

> Blessed are the dead
> *For they will:*
> Never be suspected,
> Never be chased,
> Never be unmanageable
> Never be transformed into firewood
> Never be killed

For they are now:
Protected from adversaries
Saved from opponents
Secured from the persecution of this world
Blessed are those who are dead

The National Household Survey found that about a quarter of the population had had a traumatic experience such as being physically attacked or threatened with death, or had witnessed an attack or the burning of a home, or had participated in violence (1995:98-9).

3.3.5 "Border" patrol

Like the sjambok the border has functioned as a curious cipher in South Africa's political and cultural history, with the regime's "boys on the border" often going well beyond the formal boundaries of place and conduct. Sipho Sepamla's poem "The Borders" (1975:10) parodies the language of conscription to mock the apartheid state's attempts to defend itself against the majority of South Africans:

There are borders to defend
It must be done, it must
We shall need to stand shoulder to shoulder
To act in unison...

Shabbir Banoobhai's poem "The Border" (1980:36) reminds privileged and apolitical South African minorities that the border is not some fixed and distant outpost but is often an ideological and mythical construct:

the border

is as far
as the black man
who walks alongside you

as secure
as your door
against the unwanted knock

Responses to the poem would be polarised according to the politics readers bring to it. While reactionary readers would understand it to be addressing one of their worst bogeys (black "infiltration"), progressive readers would recognise its simple assertion that the binaries set up by the state were not against a remote, demonised enemy, but against people who have more rights to the land than anyone else.

It is clear from Banoobhai's poem that the border stands for a psychological as much as a physical phenomenon in a land where separateness was fetishised to sustain a minority's monopoly. The apartheid state constructed a host of borders, such as those between the black "homelands" and "black reserves/townships" on the one hand, and "white South Africa" on the other. Chris van Wyk's poem "A Riot Policeman", from his collection *It is time to go home* (1979:50-1), juxtaposes the activities of an apartheid footsoldier on patrol in a township with the simple peace of his home life. The poem suggests that the comfortable domestic world of the privileged is secured through the repression of dissenting township residents:

> The hippo crawls
> in a desultory air of triumph
> through, around fluttering
> shirts and shoes full of death.
> Teargas is shimmering.
> Tears have been dried by heat
> or cooled by death.
> Buckshot fills the space
> between the maimed and the mourners.
> It is time to go home...
>
> Tonight he'll shed his uniform.
> Put on his pyjamas.
> Make love to his wife.
> Tomorrow is pay-day.
> But it is time to go home now,
> It is time to go home.

Van Wyk goes beyond the divisive logic and psychological barriers set up by apartheid to render the soldier's perspective. As an activist, the poet signals the importance of understanding the agents of the state, the better to assess their vulnerable points and counter their menace. He subtly shows up the banality of evil in an earlier stanza, where the artificial distance between the riot policeman's work and his home life enables him to treat his work as a routine job:

> Tonight's last bullet
> has singed the day's last victim
> an hour ago. It is time to go home.

When the townships became the battlefields in the liberation struggle, the domestic lives and homes of many residents were sacrificed. Van Wyk's insistent repetition of the title of the collection in the concluding lines of all four stanzas ("It is time to go home") resonates with other calls for the removal of the troops from the townships.

By contrast, Kelwyn Sole's speaker in "Diagnosis: South African soldier" (1983:14) expresses the contemptuous attitude that most activists had towards the security forces:

you're a victim too,
you fool.

No one was exempt from paying the price of the thorough-going repression, not even its principal beneficiaries: the finding that 41% of white South African men have had experiences that disturbed them psychologically (*NHS*, 1995:98-9) can be largely attributed to their security force activities in the townships or in the regional wars.

There have been some conscientious objectors: by the 1980s an average of 4 000 white men failed to report for military service each year by evading the call-up, leaving the country or serving time in prison, like Richard Steele, Billy Paddock, Brett Myrdal and Ivan Toms (Frederickse, 1986:82-5). In response to a call from the Black Sash for an end to compulsory conscription the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) was formed in 1983. By rallying young whites into defiance the ECC proved to other disbelieving South Africans that some of the principal beneficiaries of the apartheid state had serious differences with the regime. The ECC called for the withdrawal of the SADF from Namibia, Angola and the townships, and for an end to the militarisation of South African society. It earned the wrath of the state, which retaliated with detentions, raids, restrictions (in 1988) and other forms of harassment. The ECC was subject to the dirty tricks of the Military Intelligence, which ran fake pamphlet campaigns to smear the organisation.

Anti-conscription and anti-SADF literature was produced, such as the untitled poem by the activist Steve Kromberg, which was read at the Conscription Action Focus Week at the University of Cape Town in May 1984 (Frederikse, 1986:86). There was also the ironically-titled English and Afrikaans collection of stories, *Forces Favourites*[12], and Darrell Roodt's film *The Stick*. Anthony Akerman's play *Somewhere on the Border*, which was performed at the Grahamstown festival in 1986, addressed the violence and the brutalising effects of conscription under apartheid.

Notes:

1. These words are from Sankie Nkondo's poem "Solomon Mahlangu" (1990:29-30).

2. The source is a text which does not declare an author, *Now Everyone is Afraid* (1988:3). Subsequent references will be indicated as *NEA*.

3. Evidence led before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Eugene de Kock trial, the Magnus Malan trial and the Motherwell trial confirms that death squad or "third force" activities were closely linked to the existing structures of power.

4. Zinjiva Nkondo dedicates the poem to his wife Ndlovukazi Nkondo who, in Feinberg's anthology *Poets to the People* (1980) has the *nom de guerre* of Rebecca Matlou (Zinjiva's alias being Victor Matlou). Since returning from exile she has published a collection under her name, Sankie Nkondo. Subsequently known as Sankie Mthembi-Nkondo, when she took office as the Minister of Housing, she has since remarried, and is now known as Sankie Mthembi-Mahanyele.

5. Five people were accused of killing him, including a political rival, Moonlight Gasa, the mayor of Lamontville. At the trial it was argued by one of the accused, Vakuthethwa Yalo, that the Durban municipality knew about the plot to kill Dube, and that the police had agreed to pay for the murder. All five accused were found guilty. Gasa received a sentence of twelve years, while Yalo was condemned to death. His appeal against the death sentence was dismissed by the Appeal Court, but found favour elsewhere: his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment by P.W. Botha (Mshengu, 1992:51-64), whose government had shown no qualms about hanging people who fought in the resistance.

6. Later, in what amounts to an admission of guilt, the state agreed to compensation to the value of R1,3 million (Webster and Friedman, 1989:34).

7. Some policemen have been implicated in a range of cases. For instance, Gideon Nieuwoudt is known to have been involved in the deaths of Steve Biko, Topsy Mdaka, Siphiwo Mthimkulu, the PEBCO 3, and the Cradock 4 among others.

8. This information was drawn from various newspaper articles and radio broadcasts at the time.

9. Father Mkatshwa is currently the Deputy Minister of Education.

10. This has been confirmed by evidence to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1996 and by the amnesty application of the Minister of Police at the time, Adriaan Vlok.

11. Shortly after the bombing Shirley Gunn was held in detention, and her toddler was put into an institution. It has since emerged that the bombing of Khotso House was a "third force" operation by the security forces, and that the "order to destroy the building originated in P.W. Botha's office" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, *SABC 2*, 27.10.96). Gunn has attempted to sue Adriaan Vlok, who was the Minister of Police at the time. Vlok applied to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for amnesty for unspecified reasons.

12. The title is a play on the name of a long-running request programme for soldiers on the state-controlled South African Broadcasting Corporation radio service.

Chapter Four: "Here be dragons": challenging (conservative) liberal constructions of resistance literature

4.1 Introduction

> Culture is the product of the old leisured classes who seek now to defend it against new and destructive forces. Culture is the inheritance of the new rising class.... all the contending parties are keen enough on culture to want to be identified with it. But then, we are none of us referees in this; we are all in the game, playing in one or other direction (Williams 1958:319).

> the white middle-class establishment was not, as it claimed, the paradigm of South African life, and white culture was not the definitive South African culture (Gordimer, 1988a:228).

Besides the state the other significant hegemonic formation that the emergent culture of liberation had to contend with comprised white English-speaking intellectuals who took a serious interest in South African literature.

Liberals have been highly influential in the production and reception of literature in English, through university English departments, literary journals and literary magazines, publishing houses, the English Academy of South Africa, the Grahamstown Festival, the Market Theatre[1], and most of the English press. Despite their influence, the liberals have been a small group. Estimating that liberals comprise some 5% of South Africa's population, Peter Horn argues that

> a culture catering to less than five percent of the population of a nation is a limited culture and a limiting culture; it is time we saw through the proposition that culture is by nature only for the select few (Horn, 1994:11).

While Horn's conclusion is important, the size of the liberals is but a fraction of his estimate.[2] Further, although there has been a tendency to refer to this group inclusively as liberals, it has ranged from what may be designated as the conservative liberals to the left liberals, and it has also been used to refer to academic Marxists.

The term "conservative liberals" is used to denote people who seek to characterise themselves as liberal but whose political and social behaviour has been conservative, ie., directed towards maintaining their privileged position in the existing structure of power:

> Sociologists who have studied the white community of the sixties conclude that, on the whole, one is dealing with a conservative majority, and this

> includes the English-speaking South Africans whose liberal tradition has been greatly exaggerated. Although there is no aggressive racialism among many of them, prejudices and stereotyped attitudes towards the black community... abound (Alvarez-Pereyre, 1984:24).

The conservative liberals have been the largest and most organised group among the liberals. Despite the openness and tolerance that tends to characterise liberals in societies with a history of democracy, South African conservative liberals appear to have been influenced by the need to secure their minority interests. Although they disapproved of apartheid, the conservative liberals feared the majority rule attendant upon a democratic dispensation.

This group is central to understanding the hesitations, silences, gaps and misrepresentation in the literary discourse that deals with the development of resistance literature. Despite the lively and varied experiments in poetry and other genres (notably drama and music) in the 1970s and 1980s there were very few attempts to develop a sense of what these expressions might mean, particularly in relation to the socio-political contestation and transformation that was underway.

The conservative liberal intellectuals treated the literature that struggled out of the silencing of the repression ambivalently and reductively. While the state policed cultural production, they tried to adapt it to their taste through their critical prescriptions. They assumed that their own inability to address questions of power should constitute the standard of engagement, and that resistance writers should be content to address such problems at a "literary remove". Such critics did not define or contextualise their own power, or question how it was produced. They would have it believed that they operated "in abstraction from the institutional sites in which the complex relations of discourse and power are actually negotiated" (Pechey, 1989:52), and claimed to be apolitical in a highly politicised society, as the influential poet and critic Douglas Livingstone did for a long time[3].

Despite their expressions of support for freedom of expression, the conservative liberals' responses to the state's repression of resistance writers and writing indicated their fears of risking their privileges. Alvarez-Pereyre questions their role during the wave of suppression of black writers in the early 1960s:

> Where, in fact, during this period of continuing crisis about the basic freedoms, were the white South African writers and intellectuals? Better equipped than most of their compatriots to respond to the events of the time, could they - should they - have remained indifferent? What English- or Afrikaans-speaking groups protested in 1963 or 1966 against the silencing of the near totality of black writers? (1984:18)

When the poetry collection *Cry Rage!* by James Matthews and Gladys Thomas was banned in 1972 Oswald Mtshali complained about the absence of an outcry:

> there were no petitions signed by the white intelligentsia, there were no vociferous shoutings by the white liberal press, and no fund was established to help the proscribed writers by taking the matter to court (Chapman, 1982:109).

It appears that the conservative liberals did not operate much beyond the political universe of the ruling National Party. It is therefore not surprising that most conservative liberal intellectuals seemed to have reservations about the challenges that writers like Matthews were raising:

> As one reads these poems, with their impassioned pleas and their directness of tone... the explosion of a vengeful anger and the promise of retribution, it is easy to see why the whites, on reading the volume, felt as if they had been slapped in the face. They were accustomed to the black man's submissiveness; they had come to think that he would never stand up and defy them with such vehemence, that he would never contest their authority so frankly and openly, with the result that *Cry Rage!* seemed to be the expression of a South African version of Black Power (Alvarez-Pereyre, 1984:214).

This contradicts the liberal expression of common cause with writers who belonged to oppressed groups, and suggests the impact of the historical, racial, class and cultural divisions of South African society.

4.2 Conservative liberal constructions of literature: the phenomenon of "protest literature"

> All critics declare not only their judgement of work but also their claim to the right to talk about it and judge it. In short, they take part in a struggle for the monopoly of legitimate discourse about the work of art, and consequently in the production of the value of the work of art (Bourdieu, 1993:35).

While they were conspicuously muted in their response to the actions of the state, the conservative liberals used the repression, either consciously or unconsciously, to advance their power and interests. To maintain their cultural dominance they tried to absorb and deflect the challenge of resistance writing.

The academic A.G. Ullyatt's article "Dilemmas in black poetry" (1977) is a blatant example of conservative liberal attempts to maintain their cultural dominance by containing, marginalising or excluding resistance literature. Ullyatt was challenged by Slabbert (1978), Sole (1978b) and Maughan-Brown (1979). Less extreme, though still Eurocentric (and more influential than Ullyatt's article), are the approaches of the editors of various poetry anthologies[4]. For instance, in their introduction to *Voices of the Land: An Anthology of South African Poems* the editors, Marcia Leveson and Jonathan Paton, make the following assertion:

> Our intention is to give the reader a sense of the development of South African poetry since its beginnings with Thomas Pringle in the early nineteenth century (1985:7).

Leveson and Paton's identification of South African poetry with white English South African poetry is significant.[5] Their comments indicate the lag between the phenomenon of resistance poetry (which had appeared for a full generation) and the conservative liberal reception of it, suggesting the theoretical hiatus that characterised such approaches to South African literature.

Another example that suggests an unconscious Anglocentrism occurs in a press interview with the winner of the Sanlam Literary Award in 1987, Professor Michael Chapman. Discussing the struggles of creative writers to deal with social reality, he remarked: "Poetry in South Africa is not a precious retreat. Since the 1820s it has engaged itself with social problems" (*The Daily News*, 4.9.87:11).[6] Both sets of statements clarify the exclusions on which conservative liberal discourse was founded. Many South African resistance poems of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s show the influence of indigenous oral traditions that predate Pringle and British settlement in this region. The omission of indigenous literary/cultural traditions from Chapman's construction is particularly surprising, given the Chapman and Dangor anthology (1982), which has "San" and "Khoi-Khoi" material, and Chapman's extensive representation of black poets in a series of anthologies. This seems to suggest the extent to which ideology overrides data. The context that informs such a contradiction may be found, as Amilcar Cabral has suggested, in colonial constructions of history:

> The colonialists have a habit of telling us that when they arrived in Africa they put us into history. You are well aware that it's the contrary - when they arrived they took us out of our own history (Brett, 1986:83).

Like Chapman, Leveson and Paton also represent black poets, although their "group" interest seems to prevent them from accounting for the impact of "other" cultural traditions.[7] It seems axiomatic that "every explanation must secure and assure a certain kind of being-in-the-world" (Spivak, 1987:105-6).

A.G. Ullyatt's mystification of the continent, is part of an approach that chooses to ignore the material conditions that inform black culture and literature.[8] Responding to Ullyatt's invocation of the "perennial problem... of whether politics and poetry can mix" (1978:53-54), Jos Slabbert counters that such a question is foreclosed, it "doesn't exist in a country where going to the toilet is political" (1978:86).

A further problem with conservative liberal representation is encapsulated in Chapman's shorthand use of the term "Soweto Poets" (eg., in his 1982 collection *Soweto Poetry*) to refer to poets such as Serote, Gwala, Sepamla and Mtshali, when only one of them, Sepamla, actually lived in Soweto for a time. Mafika Gwala, the Mpumalanga (KwaZulu-Natal) poet-activist challenged the reductive and inaccurate use of the internationally-recognisable name:

> I refuse to be called a "Soweto Poet". We have all disagreed with the labelling... a good example of liberal patronizing. I just cannot consider

> myself in the mould of a "Soweto Poet". Living with constant fear and bitter anger in this country does not revolve around Soweto alone (1989:70).

The precarious subject position of the conservative liberals clarifies the dilemma of some settler cultures: never substantive and too remote from the European "centre", they compensate for their marginality by asserting their power in the ex-colony as neo-colonial guardians of access to the "centre" of cultural life:

> The putative center welcomes selective inhabitants of the margin in order better to exclude the margin. And it is the center that offers the official explanation; or, the center is defined and reproduced by the explanation that it can express (Spivak, 1987:107).

Gwala's objection has a parallel in Njabulo Ndebele's opposition to the title of the anthology of black poetry, *Ask Any Black Man*, that was edited by Tim Couzens and Essop Patel and published by Ravan Press. Ndebele's stated objections had to do with the implication in the title that the collection comprised "protest poetry":

> None of my poems have been written for people who wanted to hear me complain. They have been written in order to share serious insights, to share perceptions, and to *alter* perceptions in a most profound manner (1983:45).[9]

Ndebele treats literature as an activist, he does not share the conservative liberal conception of protest literature as a safety valve in an oppressive society.

There are different views regarding the meaning of the term protest literature and the period in which it occurred.[10] Richard Rive offers a sense of the construct:

> protest literature [addresses] the discrimination implicit in black-white relationships, and... is critical of white, racial domination. Its literature is produced by black unenfranchised non-citizens for whites who have the vote and so can effect change (1983:26).

Some activist-writers, like Dennis Brutus, described themselves as protest writers in the 1960s (eg., see Owomoyela, 1993:131). So did the poet and critic, Cosmo Pieterse (1969), who used the term in the period before the rise of Black Consciousness. Brutus and Pieterse's sense of the term (particularly given Brutus' sports activism) was quite remote from the diluted meaning the term acquired in conservative liberal discourse (which Rive's analysis reproduces). Given the bannings, house arrests and exit permits to which resistance writers like Brutus and Alex la Guma were subject, sympathetic foreign audiences were often all they could anticipate in the short and medium term.

Given the repression in the 1960s and the conservative liberal cultural hegemony, some of the next wave of resistance writers may have felt obliged to appeal to sympathetic and influential local or foreign audiences in some of their work. It is possible, for example, to read Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali's "The Master of the House" (1972:55) and Motshile wa Nthodi's "South African Dialogue" (Chapman and Dangor, 1982:95-6) as protest that appealed to the

sympathetic fractions of the ruling class (the liberals) for relief. Owomoyela has suggested that

> Protest poetry may be thought of as a black expression of liberalism - a poetry of personal response to oppression based on assumptions of justice, rights, and human dignity (1993:131).

However, even the more liberal black critics and writers like Richard Rive were wary of a literary category that traded in stereotypes and simplifications:

> Writing is at white heat and in exclamation marks so that the final product is often crude, ill-constructed and stylistically weak (1983:29).

Rive pointed out that "almost all contemporary writers do not fit comfortably" into the category of protest literature (1983:22). According to Gareth Cornwell, Rive had described protest literature as "writing produced by blacks for white consumption" (1980:58). Cornwell clarified Rive's position with the argument that, "It was essentially negative writing geared as it was to invoking a sympathetic attitude from a more fortunate readership" (1980:58). The difference between Rive's position as a liberal black critic and the position of liberal white critics is significant (and will be examined later).

In exile, critics to the left of Rive, such as Njabulo Ndebele and Mbulelo Mzamane, registered greater problems with the construct of "protest literature". Ndebele addressed some of the problems of the category in different articles (1988:205-218; 1991:37-57; 1991:58-73), raising questions such as "Why the misnomer 'protest'?" (1991:46), and declaring that "what has been called protest literature has run its course in South Africa" (Ndebele, 1988:205). Mzamane also expressed serious reservations about the term:

> Now more than ever, it has become reductionist to categorise all African literature as protest. Protest literature is writing by the racially oppressed addressed to readers from the ruling class in an attempt to solicit their sympathy and support against discriminatory laws and practices.... Protest springs from a feeling of being a ward: it is the activity of apprentices, and it is the action of subordinates who see themselves as such. It is both solicitous and moderate. It functions within the system, often with regard to due process, prescribed channels of communication, and respect for law and order. The end in view of protest is reform, never revolution. Protest is a quest for accommodation, and not a struggle for empowerment (1991:60).

However, any critique of "protest writers" or "protest writing" must be predicated upon an assessment of the validity of the conservative liberal construct itself. The term "protest" has quite a different meaning in conservative liberal discourse to the construct in resistance discourse, as Mzamane begins to suggest in his subsequent references to the Karis and Carter text (1991:60-61). However, Mzamane's unwitting conflation of the two meanings under the conservative liberal rubric attests to its hegemony.

The conservative liberal construct of "protest literature" emerges as part of a neo-colonial process of alienating the production of emerging writers from the cultural production of the

oppressed majority. It is silent about the history of protest action, mass political mobilization and national resistance that characterised political behaviour over many decades (such as the Defiance campaigns, the Sharpeville incident and the Soweto uprising). Instead, the term carries the implication that resistance writers could only imagine dealing with oppression through a beseeching and individualised literature of complaint, which suggests that Wally Serote was justified in his concerns that

> [t]he oppressor's very concept of culture, rather than leading people to deal with their own realities, serves to confuse and distract (Watts, 1989:252).

4.3 Conservative liberal constructions of audience

> South African literary studies has come to be seen as temporally arrested, hypostatized, excessively curatorial and unmindful of its socio-political situation.... First, oppositional discourses are ignored. Secondly, they are recuperated and marginalized; shoved into a corner or put to use by the hegemony. Thirdly, if these blatantly dismissive strategies fail, a polarization or strategic opposition is created, a very common manouevre in the history of the maintenance of knowledge formations (Ryan, 1990:7).

It is possible that some resistance writers may have written for a liberal white audience for reasons that have to do with power and access: the effects of liberal hegemony, which suggested the naturalness of such a readership; a belief that this was the route to "universal" reception; the pressure upon emerging writers in a highly stratified society to accept a marginal identity in the cultural spaces of a dominant group; a desperation to be published; or a belief that little else was possible, given the level of political repression.

However, most resistance writers' struggles for equality tended to inform their relationships with all their audiences, ruling out the obsequious literature of complaint that came parcelled with the conservative liberal appellation. Ndebele's objection to the title *Ask Any Black Man* (1983:44-5) challenges the hegemony of conservative liberal assumptions regarding the audience of protest literature. While such a title directs the anthology of (mainly) resistance poems towards liberal whites (implicit in the power-laden issue of *who* does the asking), it reinforces the conservative liberals' position that "protest literature" was directed primarily towards themselves. Ndebele's continuing disquiet over the conservative liberal construction of audience is evident from his subsequent assessment that "[t]he question of the audience for this 'protest literature' is a problematic one" (1991:45).

Many resistance poets had complex notions of their intended audiences. The radical writer James Matthews has treated his different audiences quite distinctly:

> *Cry Rage!* is manifestly intended for two kinds of reader, by definition very different from each other: to his white readers, Matthews shouts his disgust and warns of the approaching "day of anger", while he tries to open the eyes of his black readers to their subjection and to instill in them courage and pride (Alvarez-Pereyre, 1984:20).

Owing to the structural violence of apartheid (which had consequences for education, language policies, library facilities and so on), the construction of emerging readers was largely an act of faith on the part of writers who anticipated and fostered their development. By inserting themselves as the principal audience the conservative liberals further marginalised or negated people who had been systematically excluded by the apartheid dispensation. By diminishing the complex range of readers assumed by resistance writers (including the sympathetic audiences that were developing overseas), and presenting themselves as the sole or most significant audience, the conservative liberals tried to increase their control over the reception of the literature. Ndebele raises the implicit contradiction in such a position:

> Such factors as the levels of literacy in English among the African population would *objectively* point towards a particular audience: an English-speaking liberal one at that. But that audience, schooled under a Eurocentric literary tradition, was in turn, schooled to reject this literature "meant" for them (1991:45).

From the late-1960s most activist-writers (like Matthews) responded by focusing their attacks not just on the state but on conservative liberal attempts at directing resistance literature (as is manifest in the literature of Black Consciousness).

The conservative liberals constructed themselves as the authoritative interpretive community of resistance literature. A.G. Ullyatt (1977) and Stephen Watson (1990) show their presumption of themselves as part of the principal "interpretive community". This bears similarities to the widespread assumption among intellectuals of themselves as the "natural" audience of literature, as exemplified by Stanley Fish's "interpretive community" (1980). Such a position is produced through the tactical delimitation of the noun "community" as the conservative liberals tried, in Bourdieu's terms, to impose the norms of their own perception, ie., to be perceived as they perceive themselves (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983:19). In this way, questions regarding the source of interpretive authority are circumvented, and authority devolves as if by default upon a tiny intellectual coterie which constitutes itself as "universal", transparent and ahistorical, but which tended to be white, male, middle-class and Anglocentric. The presumption of a fairly homogeneous audience represents a tactical disregard of the deep divisions in South African society. Ndebele comments sceptically that

> Conventional wisdom proclaims that [protest] literature was premised on its supposed appeal to the conscience of the white oppressor (1991:45).

Through the construct of protest literature conservative liberal intellectuals installed themselves as the intended audience of resistance writers with the suggestion that as a sympathetic portion of the ruling bloc they would intercede on behalf of the oppressed. However, there was great silence about their attendant responsibilities - all that has been obvious is the presence of a fastidious audience. The strategy served to strengthen the legitimacy of the conservative liberal hegemony, while freeing the supposed intercessories from action and accountability. That Ndebele has been alert to the contradiction is evident in his persistent question:

> But what of the audience for whom this literature was not "objectively" meant? What about the *effective* audience? (1991:45)

This is the key question. Although it is not answered in the essay in which it is raised, the title that Ndebele gave the essay, "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary", offers direction.

Misleadingly radical in appearance, the conservative liberal construction of protest represents a hegemonic epistemological formation that reproduces the dominant relations of exclusion and subordination. Through a range of class and culture-bound prescriptions "protest literature" was used to contain and co-opt resistance writers into accepting a marginalised position that did not materially threaten the *status quo*, of which the conservative liberals were beneficiaries. As such, the construct tends to mask the privileging of the conservative liberal critics who had set themselves up as agents of production of "protest literature", ie., as publishers and critics. Their main objective seems to have been the reproduction of their social power.

The effect of the narrow subjectivity of the conservative liberals proves to be a problem even when they attempt to address a broader audience: eg., the statement of Leveson and Paton (1985:7), which was addressed in the previous section, suggests that these academics could only imagine their readership to be conservative liberal white English-speaking South Africans like themselves. This is similar to the assumption Ndebele challenged in the title *Ask Any Black Man* (1983:44-5).

4.4 Resistance writers challenge conservative liberal subjection

> The institutionalization of an imperialist discursive form under the guise of a neutral (objective, truth-serving, self-evident, ideologically disinterested) rationality is the source of the current cultural-social power in the South African academy. The situational, historical and ideological basis of the controlling voices in literary studies is effectively concealed (Ryan, 1990:4).

The hegemony of the conservative liberal publishers, editors and critics hampered resistance writers from participating in the process of political contestation. The writer and critic Kelwyn Sole addresses the cultural distortions that have issued from the conservative liberal monopolies:

> Critics and editors are in the job of making discriminations: but I feel we are still in a situation where a tiny group of critics and editors have far too much relative power - they control most poetry magazines and literary journals, they sit in judgement of most poetry competitions, they sit in professorial splendour on the boards of the various academies, they perform the great weight of the reviewing in this country - and their lack of a sense of relativeness astounds and worries me. They have a power of exclusion far in excess, it seems to me, of their powers of discrimination (1990:61).

An early challenge to the influence of the conservative liberals came from David Evans, who identified closely with the resistance struggle. Evans had been imprisoned for five years for sabotage in the 1960s (Alvarez-Pereyre, 1984:85). Writing in exile after his release Evans challenged conservative liberal prescriptions about the role of the poet in a police state. In the poem "If Poets Must Have Flags" (Feinberg, 1980:20-1) Evans suggests that the conservative liberal critics choose the desocialized, ahistorical Formalist and New Critical interpretive procedures because of their own historical crisis of location:

> They
> ask the poet to be
> a songbird in a cage

The conclusion contains an engaged and defiant manifesto. Attacking petty bourgeois sensibilities, Evans rejects the conservative liberal subculture that tries to deal with its political marginality by asserting its cultural significance:

> We refuse.
>
> We'll go ugly and free
> exhuming the corpses
> releasing the rot
> revealing the holes ripped by the shot.
> We'll wrap around our banners
> the guts of the dead
> - if we must have flags
> let them always be red.

The constructive interventions of conservative liberals in black resistance literature tended to be linked to their access to, or control of, journals and publishing. During the late 1960s and early 1970s a strong contingent of black poets emerged (in literary magazines like *The Classic*), and in 1971 Lionel Abrahams published an anthology of Oswald Mtshali's poems *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*,[11] which initiated debate on the value of black poetry. Liberal intellectuals responded with reviews, debates, articles and conferences. However,

reservations were expressed by writers like Serote, Ndebele and Rive about the role of the conservative liberal critics, as captured in Anne McClintock's description of them as

> tactful squadrons of moral teachers, advisors, and bewilderers [who] coax those who are ruled into admitting the legitimacy and "universality" of the ruler's values (1987:229).

Preoccupied with the actions of the state, writers like Gwala and Matthews rejected the conservative liberals' imposition of "protest literature", which they saw as an ideological category that did violence to their work. Gwala challenged the "academics who claim an almost sacerdotal authority over black writing" (1984:43), demanding,

> what moral right does the academic have to judge my style of writing? What guidelines outside the culture of domination has he applied? (1984:48).

Incensed by the conservative liberals' attempts to patrol poetic discourse the Cape Flats writer, James Matthews, rejected the title of poet, declaring "I am not a poet" (1984:74). Matthews explained his position as follows:

> 1972 became too much for me. The Dimbazas, Ilinges, Sadas and Limehills. Dying children - starvation, their sickness. I could write but I was not doing anything about the situation. I felt physically ill.
>
> I wrote. It was not prose. Critics hyena-howled. It was not poetry. I never said it was. I write expressions of feelings (1984:74).

Backed into a false dichotomy by the conservative liberal prioritisation of art over politics, Matthews insisted that the form his writings took was less important than their substance. Peter Horn records Matthews' reaction to the term "Poetry?": "Bullshit!" (1994:13). Gareth Cornwell points out that to

> judge Matthews' work in terms of an "aesthetic ideology" which he has deliberately jettisoned is inappropriate.... For Matthews it is clear that the message is indeed more important than art (1980:67-8).

A later anthology of Matthews, *Poisoned Wells and Other Delights* is pointedly subtitled: "a collection of feelings" (1990). Matthews echoes the dilemma that Ntombiyakhe Kabiyela Kaxhoka expressed a decade earlier in her poem "When last did I have a good laugh?" (1979:61):

> These are no poems crooning
> Sweet nothings
> These are my feelings

Thoroughly resentful of the conservative liberal control of resistance writing, Matthews chose to publish his own work, and did so by creating Blac Publishing House.

The imperviousness of conservative liberal critics to the concerns of the resistance writers arose out of their preoccupation with their own material and psychological needs. Central to the existence of the minority interest group has been its ability to impose

> its preoccupations and problems, its particular solutions and its vision of the world on all other sectors... to prescribe the conceptual and real universe according to its own law (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983:17).

To this end the conservative liberals reproduced the restless and alienated character of western poets and other artists as being natural and archetypal. By fetishising literature they attempted to avoid the insistent social and political issues as is evident in the critical work of the most prominent representatives of conservative liberalism in the period under survey, Lionel Abrahams and Stephen Watson. As Abrahams' work has received much attention[12], the focus will be on Stephen Watson who, in the mid-to-late 1980s, exemplified the conservative liberal position on South African poetry (as his critical essays and the responses of other conservative liberals suggest). Writing some years after Ullyatt, Watson shows little advance on his position regarding poetry:

> It is the loneliest of arts, the one which in this century can fittingly be called the widow and widower of all the arts, the one most neglected, most bereaved, most impotent (1990:15).

Given the millions of oppressed people that conservative liberals have consistently marginalised in their work, the image is surprising. Through the fetish of the (white, middle class) individual the conservative liberals sought to "universalise" their alienation. "Most white English poets," McClintock argues, "comforted themselves... that the lonely poetic voice was also the eloquent mouthpiece of universal truth" (1987:237-8). As with other conservative liberals like Guy Butler and Douglas Livingstone, Watson's problem is located in his own marginality, which he projects as a characteristic of the field. Watson's statement unwittingly suggests the problematic political and social character of conservative liberalism, even as it reveals its comfortable race and class positioning.

Watson's position must be read against the socially committed work that appeared in spite of the oppression of the 1970s and 1980s. In contrast to Watson's perspective, Mothobi Mutloatse, writing at around the same time, clarified the continuing emphasis by black writers on socio-political issues:

> the mood in black literature can never be otherwise but challenging, in that the whole situation is still the same as the one that prevailed with the previous generation of writers, in that we are still disenfranchised, we have no vote, we have no land, and - if anything - things are getting worse economically and otherwise (Welz, 1987:47).

Less privileged South African writers were facing more serious crises than the conservative liberals, such as dealing with the decimation of fellow artists and comrades. Chris van Wyk's poem "We can't meet here, brother: for Thami Mnyele" (1978:34) was written after the artist and activist Thami Mnyele was killed in an SADF raid on Botswana on 14 June 1985, in which twelve people, including a Batswana child, were slaughtered. The poem is not so much

a critique of the state (which may be assumed), instead Van Wyk focuses on the distraction caused by the powerful and self-serving conservative liberal press and intellectuals. Masquerading as "universal" concerns, their narrow interests threatened to drown out the precarious communication networks between oppressed people:

> I can't hear you brother!
> for the noise of the theorists
> and the clanging machinery of the liberal Press.

Watson's concerns reveal a solipsistic world. In a period of enormous social division, inequity and conflict, Watson's 1987 essay "Shock of the Old: What's Become of 'Black' Poetry" (1990) posits a "truth" that affirms the privileged minority to which he belongs:

> One simply has to remember who are the best writers in this country. Without exception they are those who have been most aware of other world literatures and traditions elsewhere (1990:84).

To an extent, Watson's argument regarding "the best writers in this country" is reflexive, celebrating himself as a "universal intellectual". Drawing on Foucault, Spivak maintains that there are no "universal intellectuals", only specific intellectuals, who are located in specific contexts according to their conditions of life or work (1990:3-4). Through such an argument Spivak exposes an opportunistic intellectual internationalism that abdicates responsibility for its immediate institutional and other contexts (1990:1-16).

Watson assumes his readers to be a like-minded audience of white, English-speaking conservative liberals in his expectation that his readers would be tolerant of narrow theoretical and ideological underpinnings of his argument. He responds to his own cultural and political alienation from the majority of South Africans by focusing defensively on what he calls "world literatures". This more circumspect formulation is in response to previous challenges, such as Cronin's exhortation that South Africans need to "learn how to speak" (1983:58) to and of themselves, and the postcolonial challenge that the term "universal" has served as a synonym for the West. The context of Watson's argument suggests that by "world literature" he does not refer to more than the colonial notion of "universal".[13] The ideological content of the conservative liberals' cultural production appears "complicit with Western international economic interests... to conserve the subject of the West, or the West as Subject" (Spivak, 1988:271). A *bona fide* spirit of internationalism to challenge the narrow repressiveness of apartheid has been absent from the conservative liberals' construction of culture: only the powerful colonial and neo-colonial capitals have been of significance in their scheme, with not even South Africa's immediate neighbours being considered.

The few oppressed writers who developed were not encouraged but rather diverted (eg., through the construct of "protest literature") from reinvesting the scarce resources they had tapped back into their communities. In a developing society production, including cultural production, must of necessity service local needs as a priority. Such a society cannot afford to expend scarce resources servicing the exotic consumption of a tiny international petit-bourgeois elite while economic, political and cultural underdevelopment characterises the overwhelming majority of its people.

4.5 "Them" and "us": standards and privileges

> Critics and editors are in the job of making discriminations: but I feel we are still in a situation where a tiny group of critics and editors have far too much relative power - they control most poetry magazines and literary journals, they sit in judgement of most poetry competitions, they sit in professorial splendour on the boards of the various academies, they perform the great weight of the reviewing in this country - and their lack of a sense of relativeness astounds and worries me. They have a power of exclusion far in excess, it seems to me, of their powers of discrimination (Sole, 1990:61).

When few resistance writers adhered to the conservative liberal literary prescriptions they were harshly criticised for failing to measure up. The most common complaint was against the "overly political" nature of resistance literature, as in Watson's argument that South African poetry has suffered "under the internal siege of its own political obsessions" (1990:91). In the essay "Dilemmas in black poetry", Watson's predecessor A.G. Ullyatt uses a host of value-laden terms like "intrinsic poetic merits", "authenticity" and "tradition" (1977:51-62) while ignoring the effects of the state's repression on black writers and writing. By negating the historical, political, legal, economic and social imperatives that inform oppressed lives, critics like Ullyatt fail to recognise that black poets have been responding to the exigencies of their material conditions, and that they have adapted English to address the predicament.

Implicit in Watson's statements regarding "the best writers in this country" (1990:84) and in his notion of "universality" are references to the debate on standards in South African literature, which are linked to debates in other arenas, such as academia in the 1980s, when black students who had gone through Bantu education began to enter the tertiary institutions set aside for racial minorities. Most of the discourse on standards has issued from groups whose restrictive rhetoric around "excellence", "quality" and "merit" was intended to serve as pre-emptive mechanisms of exclusion, and to address fears about the loss of minority privileges.[14] Herbert Vilakazi and Botlhale Tema point out that

> merit is usually concern over power, material and emotional security, and the desire to perpetuate monopoly over these positions for the current incumbents and their kind, be it based on class, race, sex, religion (Jansen, 1991:135).

This is confirmed by the absence of any explanation in conservative liberal discourse regarding what is meant by standards, the absence of any motivation or contextualisation for particular standards, the use of inappropriate critical instruments, and the mystification of criteria, such as "the best writers", which is assumed to be self-evident. Little is done to clarify or service the said standards, or to take responsibility for producing them. Most references to standards tend to be rhetorical and reflect colonial and neo-colonial dependency, and have little validity in relation to the specific developmental needs of this society. A discussion on standards in South Africa is meaningless without the recognition that basic rights are an integral part of any system of standards.

Watson's comment regarding "the best writers in this country" (1990:84) ignores the fact that aesthetic value is socially constructed and dependent upon complex social and institutional circumstances, and tends to valorize the special knowledge of elite groups. Ullyatt does much the same in "Dilemmas in Black Poetry" (1977:51-62), assuming that "European literary norms are necessarily at a higher stage of development than African writing" (Sole, 1978b:92). While Watson or Ullyatt are entitled to their positions, they cannot present their norms as being objective and universally applicable. Bourdieu has deconstructed the elitist notions of value implicit in Watson and Ullyatt's arguments:

> Works produced by the field of restricted production are "pure", "abstract", and "esoteric"... accessible only to those who possess practical or theoretical mastery of a refined code (1993:120).

John Fiske draws upon Bourdieu's work to demonstrate the significance of material distance as a key marker of aesthetic difference:

> the culture of the socially advantaged and empowered [tends to favour] a transcendent appreciation or aesthetic sensibility with claims to universality.... the separation of the aesthetic from the social is a practice of the elite who can afford to ignore the constraints of material necessity, and who thus construct an aesthetic which... refuses to assign any value at all to material conditions.... This critical and social distance is thus, finally, a marker of distinction between those able to separate their culture from the social and economic conditions of the everyday and those who cannot (1992:154).

It is significant that the construct of "protest literature" yields more about its purveyors than its supposed subject, resistance writing, even as it burnishes the history, ideological orientation and political power of the conservative liberals. Peter Horn's early work, "Poems at bargain prices" (1974:18; 1991:15), may be read as a cynical reaction to such self-aggrandisation. Horn exposes the economic underpinnings to the avowals of the high culture purveyors, illustrating Bourdieu's argument that "all practices, including those purporting to be disinterested" can be treated as "economic practices directed towards the maximising of material or symbolic profit" (1977:183). It is apparent that literature is an arena in which symbolic but no less serious struggles over resources, access and authority occur. The poem roguishly suggests that in the bazaar of the bourgeois economy the aim of the poet-vendor is to pander to the demands of the market, the better to flog commodities (in this Horn suggests that the conservative liberals' petit bourgeois norms are the degraded residue of bourgeois culture). The poem also suggests that although the conservative liberals make high-sounding claims, they respond to the political challenges of society by attempting to use literature as a tranquilliser:

> Poems? You want poems? We got poems!
>
> Poems to make you dream
> while the rulers of the country are busy.
> Poems to send you to sleep
> While they test their tanks and guns.

> We got poems.
>
> Poems for you and your aftermeal sleep.
> Poems which do not disturb you nor
> The quiet of a Sunday afternoon.
> When the sermon in the morning was comforting
> And the chicken at lunch was tasty.
>
> We got poems.

Threatened by the radical literary and cultural experimentation that was occurring in a volatile period of South Africa's history the conservative liberals tried to repress the radical functions of literature by maintaining an authorising power over production and interpretation (otherwise known as intellectual gatekeeping). This was done in the place of knowledge production, for which academics receive publicly funded salaries and stipends.

In contrast to the fears of conservative liberal critics like Watson, Kelwyn Sole takes a more open and constructive approach consistent with democratic process, where standards evolve through contestation:

> One of the more exciting things about this country is that there is no single standard. We live in a time where everything is up for grabs, where one has to re-examine one's aesthetic and political assumptions all the time... If some of the poetry and other art being produced right now is transitory, so what. The process of change itself is worth it, and I cannot understand the eagerness and vigour with which some poetry critics pounce on poetry (1990:62).

Towards the end of his 1989 essay "Under Pressure: Poetry in South Africa Today", Watson challenges unnamed Marxist literary critics over their sense that the literature that was coming out of the townships was significant:

> It fitted many people's sense of historical symmetry to believe that, since the townships were the crucible of resistance to the South African state, it was there too that the most responsive art should emerge. It made sense, too, to believe that just as one class was challenging another one, so one literature in this country would gain ascendancy over the other, culturally dominant one. In short, it had all the force of a certain historical logic to believe that "white" poetry was being and would be supplanted by "black" (1990:86).

In its peevishness and absence of argument Watson's comment suggests a deeply polarised view of South African society (black versus white, them versus us, etc.), which was not just inaccurate but unnecessary (as has been borne out by the history of the broad democratic movement). Watson's comment also reveals the fears that drove the "interested" neocolonial coterie to undermine the work being produced so that it could continue to enjoy its privileges. Ndebele has addressed the effects of membership of a privileged group in a divided society:

> it sent them to well equipped schools; it provided them with publishing opportunities; it sanctified their language through legislation and language academies; it gave them theatres, museums, art galleries, concert halls, and libraries; it arranged for them special salary scales that ensured access to a range of cultural facilities as well as the ability to buy books and newspapers; it created literary awards to honour them; it also made possible for some of them to become critics and reviewers who influenced literary taste and declared literary standards... it gave them passports to travel... it sought to make them take for granted the elevated status of their citizenship (1992:24).

Fear of the competition that resistance poetry posed to the English literary establishment goes some way towards explaining the hostility of such critics (Watson is also a poet). Watson's fears do not seem disconnected from self-interest, ie., having to compete for audiences, scholarships, funding, awards and journal space with the resistance poets. His argument is remarkable for how closely it resembles the invective of reactionary minorities who believed that their privileges were unfairly threatened by the impending socio-political shifts. In this Watson shows his susceptibility to the simplistic binary oppositions of apartheid. His proprietorial attempts to control discursive space show no advance on the regime's attempts to preserve minority privilege.

By contrast, Peter Horn's response to the cultural struggles of the 1980s was to challenge conservative liberal objections to thorough-going reconstruction. In "The seventh elegy" (1991:94-5) Horn urges his readers to ignore the polemics of the disinherited beneficiaries of apartheid. The poet understands his audience (whom he refers to as "we") to be comrades who resist the oppressive system:

> There will be those who only see the ruins: the shortsighted
> vision of the disinherited of the revolution will be with us
> for some time. They, who no longer own the riches of the previous times
> nor yet the riches of the rising time:
> but let us not be confused by them.

While critics like Watson have focused narrowly and normatively on issues such as the quality of expression, the challenge for most committed writers and critics was to begin to construct discursive space against and despite the repression of the state and the cultural opportunism of the conservative liberals.

Watson's construction of "us" and "them" leads, in the long concluding paragraph of the "Under Pressure" essay (1990:87), to a defensive attempt to prop up his elitist assertions of value by referring to the supportive remarks of his students, some of whom, he suggests, may have been black. Even if race were not an issue, the unequal nature of academic-student relations makes the validity of such a claim questionable. However, it also seems that the phantom of the "Native Informant" (Spivak, 1990:66) has been resurrected to serve the dominant once again. Watson's ventriloquism confirms the accuracy of Trinh Minh-ha's portrayal of the cynical way in which intellectual discourse commandeers oppressed people:

> A conversation of "us" with "us" about "them" is a conversation in which "them" is silenced. "Them" always stands on the other side of the hill, naked and speechless, barely present in its absence. Subject of discussion, "them" is only admitted among "us", the discussing subjects.... to partake in the reduction of itself and the appropriation of its otherness by a detached "us" discourse. The presence of a (grateful) witness serves to legalize such discourse, allowing it to mimic, where necessary, the voice of truth.... All admittance of "them" among "us" is a hoax (1989:67).

The overworked, racist construct of the "Native Informant" has long been pilloried by Wally Serote in "The Actual Dialogue" (1972:9), and by Watson's colleague Peter Horn in "A Vehement Expostulation" (1991:75).[15] While the title parodies upper class English histrionics, Horn's speaker represents a caricature designed to challenge the hypocritical demands conservative liberals make of their "Native Informants" by way of securing their material, social and psychic comfort[16]:

> This Meddem, is the situation as I see it:
> We live in a black-out. I can't paint it white
> with words. But for ready cash there are dominees

The speaker's obsequious manner yet pedantic tone were intended to vex conservative liberal readers, who had tried to insert themselves as the principal audience of resistance literature:

> So what do you expect, Meddem? That I write soothing verse
> to send a few million trusting souls to sleep?
> Do you imply that I don't do my duty,
> if I am desperate? Or that I should write about daisies?
>
> Or do you, Meddem, under these circumstances, expect me
> to write well balanced, polished verse? About what?
> Armies? Revolutions? Bloodshed? Apartheid?
> Or a hilarious sonnet about our impending peace?
>
> Praise be the absent Lord! You never know,
> one day I might become responsible and write
> some exquisite and contrived poem
> about my complicated soul.

In his 1985 essay about the role of poetry in society Watson speaks with favour of "an inherently conservative function" of poetry, as "one kind of check in a larger system of imbalances... which seems sadly neglected these days" (1990:19). Yet, the deployment of poetry by writers like Chris van Wyk and Dikobe wa Mogale as a "check in a larger system of imbalances" (such as apartheid and capitalism) is deprecated by Watson and other conservative liberals. This suggests the hidden role of ideology (in the preservation of the status quo) rather than the intention to check imbalances.

Ahead of Watson, Ullyatt tried to "balance" his disapproval of some poems read in October 1976 at the ninetieth anniversary of Johannesburg ("a singularly inappropriate occasion to attack any law") by arguing that

> black poets have been succumbing regularly to debilitating effects of resentment, and that has blinded them to the creative potential of a healthy rebellion (1977:58).

Ullyatt would have been in trouble if the resistance poets had matched the "healthy rebellion" of the schoolchildren a few months earlier. Ullyatt's statements illustrate the equivocation rather than the "balance" that informs the conservative liberal position,

> intensifying the illusion of tolerance and freedom, in this way *affirming* instead of weakening the repressive social structures (Slabbert, 1978:85).

4.6 Questions of form and expression

> They want anger to be buried
> in the carved tomb of verse
> (Evans in Feinberg, 1980:20-1)

> The institutionalization of an imperialist discursive form under the guise of a neutral (objective, truth-serving, self-evident, ideologically disinterested) rationality is the source of the current cultural-social power in the South African academy. The situational, historical and ideological basis of the controlling voices in literary studies is effectively concealed (Ryan, 1990:4).

Reproducing the effects of their own historic marginality the conservative liberals have refused to accept that literature could be part of a socio-political movement. They refused to acknowledge the demands upon literary discourse in a country moving towards civil war. Literature offered people resisting the state a forum. Instead, the conservative liberals responded to the crisis by railing against the "sacrifice of the intrinsic rules of the craft for political ends, formal ineptitude, loss of individual expression and originality" (McClintock, 1987:247-8).

In the guise of providing access to a superior knowledge and sense of reality, the conservative liberals were actually in retreat from social life, and foreclosed on the means by which literature could speak for and of many more people in society. They have been a part of the

institutional forces that subjected resistance writers to cultural and social manipulation, which had the effect of naturalising economic and political domination. They fetishized issues of craft and form to rationalise their cultural power, which had the effect of mystifying their class and race privileges. They diverted attention from issues such as context, culture, ideology and audience as part of a neocolonial move to naturalise elite power. Peter Horn, who worked within close proximity of various conservative liberal circles, challenged their repressive practices in the mid-1970s with a Bakthinesque or Rabelaisian harangue in "The poet as a clever invention" (1991:27-8):

> in purple shirt and orange tie
> I the accredited clown
> to this ailing society
> am allowed to tell you a few truths
> and similar nonsense
>
> so listen you christened dung-heaps!
> I will lie for you
> everything: I can invent: everything...
> looking at you I realise: 1 bottle of beer
> is better than 1 volume of poetry
> of any FORM and CONTENT poet
>
> looking at you I realise: the only
> adequate criticism
> of this society
> would be
> TO BASH IN YOUR HEADS

The tirade issues from the frustration and indignity Horn experienced as a resistance writer and is frank in its expression of anger. The writer and anthologist Mothobi Mutloatse was equally assertive in his refusal to entertain liberal prescriptions, which were based on Western bourgeois notions of artistic form:

> We are not going to be told how to re-live our feelings, pains and aspirations by anybody who speaks from the platform of his own rickety culture. We'll write our poems in narrative form; we'll write journalistic pieces in poetry form; we'll dramatise our poetic experiences; we'll poeticise our historical dramas. We will do all these things at the same time (1980:5).

Watson was born just after the Bantu Education Act (1953) took effect on the education of his black contemporaries. Yet, Watson demonstrates little grasp of its impact:

> the still-born character of much "black" poetry cannot be attributed solely to its stupefying intellectual poverty. It has been ill-served by its critics... no one seemed prepared to call the rank bad rank bad, the banal banalizing, the cliche a cliche (and *bad* because it is, in language, the supreme form of indifference to the terrible individuality of other people's suffering) (1990:85).

To deal with the last issue first, Watson's reference to the "individuality" of people's suffering is specious in a society in which 85% of the population suffered systematic oppression on the basis of their assignment to a racial group. However, the remark reflects a recognisably liberal preoccupation with the self privileged as the universal individual.

Secondly, while it may be true that some literary efforts were published before they were ready, that is an issue of the development of a writing culture in any society: the development of teachers, mentors, peers, editors, media as well as the development of judgements, skills and resources. Judgements of taste tend to be culturally informed, education and power have a bearing on the construction of value, and skill is not unconnected to resources, as cultural materialists like Williams suggest. Fetishing issues of judgement and skill and endlessly complaining about their inadequacy distracts attention from the need to take responsibility for the painstaking organic cultural development that is necessary, particularly in societies which have been built on systematic oppression. More constructive ways of dealing with the problems were addressed by the writers' workshops held by township cultural groups, the African Writers' Association and the Congress of South African Writers. However, Watson seems to see the role of the critic in very narrow terms. It fits Watson's paradigm of the marginalised literary intellectual whose role involves conducting postmortems on texts. His work shows little understanding of the possibility of making a constructive contribution to the development of literature in a society in transition.

Despite the manoeuvres of the conservative liberal critics, using English offered black resistance writers a better chance of being published. This was partly the result of the state's control, division and underdevelopment of the indigenous languages. There was scarcely any structural support for the development of a literary culture in any of the indigenous languages. Further, given the state's patronage of publishing monopolies that adhered to its line, there was no space for independent publishers and other structures of production.[17] In addition to the hegemonic power of the English language which made many black writers feel obliged to write in English (their second or third language), there were strategic reasons. Writers judged that publishing in English rendered their work less susceptible to state interference, while it increased their access to a broader community of South Africans resisting apartheid and to people located beyond the borders who read English.

Conservative liberal critics such as Ullyatt (1977) tried to sustain their power and values through offering guidance to the resistance writers who wrote in "their" medium. However, the conservative liberals failed to appreciate that the power of the English language is linked to the flexibility with which it takes on new cultural content and forms. In a talk given to the English Academy of South Africa in 1986 Njabulo Ndebele characterised the chauvinism that drove its members to try to expand the influence of the language while retaining control over it as the "art of giving away the bride while insisting that she still belongs to you" (1991:101).

On occasion even conservative liberal critics responded to the influence of power on literature. As the political situation became more polarised, conservative foreign powers (such as the Bush administration in the United States) joined in the criticism against the apartheid government. As a result the conservative liberals were in danger of being shown up as reactionaries. An unexpected outcome of conservative liberal access to foreign audiences was that those who found it difficult to subscribe to the emerging democratic process in South Africa were obliged to reconsider the terms of their engagement, even if only

rhetorically. This is apparent in the contradictory views expressed by Watson towards Chris van Wyk's poetry in two articles on "politically-engaged" South African poetry that appeared two years apart. The essay "Shock of the Old" appeared in the conservative liberal journal *Upstream*[18] in 1987, and refers to Chris van Wyk, Donald Parenzee and Dikobe wa Mogale in negative terms:

> Formally, they add very little. The curious lack of linguistic energy in much of their work can hardly be said to be counteracted by the supposed ideological progression often claimed for it (1990:83).

Yet Watson contradicts himself, in his aptly-titled 1989 *World Literature Today* article, "Under Pressure" (1990:88-99). The article registers the shift Watson felt obliged to make in his judgement of local poetry as the balance of political forces began to change and his position became untenable to the new audience he accessed (as distinct from the conservative liberal readership he presumes in *Upstream*). In "Under Pressure" Watson writes of a "remarkable satiric poem, 'In Detention'" which, he claims, is "part of this newfound depth" (1990:94) in South African poetry. However, the fact that Chris van Wyk had published the poem in his 1979 anthology *It is Time to go Home* (besides prior airings in magazines, readings and mass-meetings), ie., at least a full decade earlier, renders Watson's argument absurd. Further, Van Wyk's collection appeared eight years before Watson's derogatory earlier (1987) remarks. The change is therefore not in Van Wyk's work but in Watson's evaluation. The nature of the inconsistency suggests that this instance of change is strategic rather than out of conviction. The title of the article, "Under Pressure", unwittingly offers a reflexive indication of the equivocation that was necessary to maintain credibility in a broader context.

It emerges that while the oppressed majority was worst affected by apartheid, the development of the rest of South African society was also undermined. As Watson unintentionally reveals in his criticism, the impoverishment has not been one-sided: even the more affluent minorities have lived in ignorance, kept from basic realities, ideologically incapable of understanding the poverty of their perceptions and culture, and quite estranged from the experiences of most South Africans. The absence of dialogue between the beneficiaries and the disinherited of apartheid on the issues Watson raises accounts in no small measure for the limitations that characterise his perspective. Most conservative liberals seem to have operated principally as the custodians of a discourse. Their maps (representations) cannot be mistaken for the territory.

Notes

1. Refer to Anne Fuchs' critique of the role of the Market Theatre between 1976 and 1986 (1990:125, 127-9, 135-9).

2. The *Urban Foundation's* statistics suggest that whites as a whole comprised a little over 5 million people, ie., 12% of the population (Cooper, 1993:255). During the 1987 white elections most English-speakers voted for the National Party, to the extent that the liberal Progressive Federal Party lost its position as official opposition to the Conservative Party. Some English-speakers have supported groups to the far right of the National Party. Finally, about half of Horn's figure seems to comprise children, who are not usually included in such a count.

3. Refer to Livingstone's articles, such as: "On the writing of poetry" (1974) and "The poetry of Mtshali, Serote, Sepamla and others in English: notes towards a critical evaluation" (1976).

4. In the 1960s it was surprising if black writers were included at all: *South African Writing Today*, edited by Nadine Gordimer and Lionel Abrahams (1967) is more representative of South African writing than *The Penguin Book of South African Verse* (1968) edited by Jack Cope and Uys Krige, which included English translations of poets writing in Afrikaans and African languages, although no African writers who wrote in English were included (Alvarez-Pereyre, 1984:22).

5. Leveson and Paton's remarks have a curious parallel in the rhetoric of the state in the "era of reform": the Botha government's claim that South Africans rejected sanctions was accepted without question in most public forums (and by the liberal media), the tacit assumption being that the term "South Africans" meant white South Africans. By contrast, Mark Orkin's research into attitudes towards sanctions demonstrated that most black South Africans favoured the imposition of sanctions, and were prepared to endure short-term hardship to be rid of the minority regime (1986).

6. However, Chapman's subsequent work suggests a substantive shift from this position. Refer to "The liberated zone: the possibilities of imaginative expression in a state of emergency" (1988).

7. Chapman's *Southern African Literatures* (1996) goes a considerable distance towards addressing this conceptual gap.

8. This is a characteristic of many conservative liberal poets, eg., note Douglas Livingstone's well known poem "August Zulu" (1978:10-15).

9. Ravan Press responded by changing the title of the collection to *The Return of the Amasi Bird: Black South African Poetry 1891-1981* (1982), the first part of which was taken from Daniel Kunene's poem in the collection.

10. The conservative liberal sense of the term "protest" appears to have its roots in Thomas Karis and Gwendolen M. Carter's work *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964* (1977).

11. Through Abrahams' involvement in literary societies such as PEN (1988:286-304) and through his work as an editor he supported emerging writers. The first collections of Mtshali and Serote were published with his support.

12. Kelwyn Sole's review of a selection of Abrahams' work (1988) is particularly incisive. It follows Mike Kirkwood's analysis of Guy Butler's work, in "The Colonizer: a critique of the English South African culture theory" (1976).

13. Samora Machel has argued that

> in a society dominated by exploiting classes, the latter seek to concentrate the production of cultural models to the level of intellectual elites and force the people into the situation of being simple culture consumers.... Beneath each apparently well-intentioned argument of imperialism, like the universality of culture, hides in reality, the idea that only Western culture is universal, a racist idea, which until very recently, was openly proclaimed (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983:25).

14. Such developments are not new, as Carey (1992) suggests. As oppressed people in societies like Britain won access to education, the elites developed a discourse of standards and excellence to check their advancement.

15. Horn first published the poem in his 1979 anthology *Silence in Jail.*

16. Like Horn, other progressive white writers such as Jeremy Cronin and Kelwyn Sole have also addressed

> the reality behind the mask: behind the real prosperity of a part of the population, and behind the general complacency, one discovers a world typified by guilt and schizophrenia, a world from which one's fellow

> men [sic] - those "unlike likes" - have been banished (Alvarez-Pereyre, 1984:251-2).

17. The sole publisher in Zulu declined to publish Mazisi Kunene's *Emperor Shaka the Great*, which necessitated his having to translate it into English and publish it overseas, by which time he had decided to go into exile.

18. Refer to Oliphant's analysis of *Upstream* (Petersen and Rutherford, 1991:92-5).

Chapter Five: Black Consciousness: "spilt like this my blood speaks"[1]

5.1 The impact of Black Consciousness

> Each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it (Fanon, 1963:206).

> Cultural engagement does not preclude political engagement (Gwala, 1989:74).

> a black man's life in South Africa is endlessly a series of poems of humour, bitterness, hatred, love, hope, despair and death. His is a poetic existence shaped by the harsh realities and euphoric fantasies that surround him (Mtshali in Chapman, 1982:105).[2]

The period before the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement in the late 1960s was characterised by intense repression. Political organisations were banned. Thousands of people were convicted of undermining the security of the state and for being members of banned organisations. The African National Congress (ANC) leader, Albert Lutuli, who won the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1960, had been restricted to the district of Groutville in 1959 for "promoting feelings of hostility between the races". Robert Sobukwe, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) founder-president, who led the 1961 Sharpeville march against the pass laws, was imprisoned without trial on Robben Island from 1963 to 1969. In 1964 Nelson Mandela and seven members of the ANC were convicted to life imprisonment in terms of the Sabotage Act. By the late 1960s there were more than 1 300 people in prison for violating security laws (Motlhabi, 1984:31). Writing in the early 1960s, the writer and critic Es'kia (Ezekiel) Mphahlele had a prescient view of the literature that was beginning to develop in this repressive context:

> South African writers were fashioning an urban literature on terms that are unacceptable to the white ruling class .... [N]ot accepted as an integral part of the country's culture ... they keep on, digging their feet into an urban culture of their own making. This is a fugitive culture: borrowing here, incorporating there, retaining this, rejecting that .... The clamour of it is going to keep beating on the walls (1962:192).

The poetry that began to appear in the mid-1960s, mostly in a Johannesburg literary magazine, *The Classic*, reflected the increasing polarisation of South Africa, and played a role in the revival of resistance.

In "Lost or Found World" (1972:29), which was written while Wally Serote was still in South Africa, the themes of identity, location and the desire for liberation are the main focus. This is clear in the opening line, "The sea of identity is tears", and in the concluding lines of the poem:

> Old wishes are present deeds
> Bright with blinding for the old
> Dark with wonder for the new -
> That's where we are:
> Lost or found world!

Another of Serote's poems that develops the binaries set out in "Lost or Found World" is "Hell, Well, Heaven" (1972:24-5). As in "Lost or Found World", the speaker in "Hell, Well, Heaven" believes that only polarised options are available. In both poems the speakers represent people on the brink of making significant life choices. Opting to treat the country as "found" rather than "lost" required much faith in the most tangible resource: the will of ordinary people.

The key to the popular resistance culture of the 1970s lies with the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), which broke the silence of oppressed people, principally through its activism, its programmes and the eloquence of its charismatic leader, Steve Biko. The BCM had its roots in the South African Students' Organisation (SASO). In 1968 black university students objected to being dominated by white students in the liberal-left NUSAS (the National Union of South African Students), and broke away to establish SASO. Sipho Buthelezi argues that the rejection of old forms of political struggle required SASO to develop new ideological and political forms of struggle (Pityana, Ramphele, Mpumlwana and Wilson, 1991:119). In his poem "In Search of Roots" (1984:106) Sipho Sepamla captures the resolve of the students:

> We will have to speak up
> because for too long others have spoken for us

Steve Biko, the leader of SASO, was a student at the University of Natal, and his room at the black students' residence (a dingy old army barracks) doubled up as the SASO office. It was out of these circumstances that the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) arose. The BCM, like other organisations of the 1970s and 1980s, reflects the importance of black youth, who have played a pivotal role in the liberation movement in South Africa. The BCM was student-led rather than the youth wing of a political organisation. Among the formative influences on the movement were the Black Panthers, Frantz Fanon, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Paulo Freire and the 1968 student uprisings.

By 1971 the Black People's Convention and the Black Community Programmes were established. In this way BC, which began in the universities, spread into the black communities. The Black People's Convention had been established to bridge the gap between the intellectuals and the broader community, and one of its initial tasks involved reconstituting an identity that affirmed unity with the oppressed as the first principle. The Black Allied Workers' Union was established, and other organisations followed, such as the

National Youth Organisation and the Union of Black Journalists. During the 1973-4 labour strikes, when 152 miners were killed and over 500 were injured in clashes with police, students rallied in support. However, the Black Consciousness (BC) contribution to the labour movement was not as significant as its development of an independent philosophy (based on a definition of black people as a socially exploited group) for advancing black solidarity and liberating black people from submissiveness to white hegemony.

Like many modern social movements BC was concerned with the issue of identity. As the first liberation movement to rise up out of the repression, the BCM attended to racial identity to contest the naturalisation of the superiority of whites rather than to engage in reverse racism.

> Black Consciousness is not racialism since its long-term objective is the elimination of the very ethnic exclusivity it seems to advocate, whereas White Consciousness is racialism since its object is self-perpetuation (Rive, 1981a:21-2).

Biko's theorisation of identity was significant in a country with a history of racism and little analysis of it (for reasons of repression and self-censorship). Since race has remained a pervasive but muffled subtext in the public domain, it was to be expected that liberal or conservative intellectuals would misinterpret the strident character of BC, despite Biko's statements to the contrary, such as "In our country there shall be no minority or majority. Instead there shall be just people".[3] This is supported by the BC poet-performer Ingoapele Madingoane's assertion in "black trial eighteen" that

> we in africa will not bring colour
> between man and reality (1979:28).

Biko died very prematurely at the age of 30, with little time to develop his philosophy, which he worked on between his studies, activism and police harassment. Yet, two decades after his death, he remains one of the most powerful cultural theorists this society has produced.

The deep cultural influence of the BCM is connected to the movement's grasp of the possibilities cultural activism offered in a repressive context. Mzamane has pointed out that more than any other resistance group at the time, the BCM recognised "the essentially political importance of the cultural struggle" (Pityana et al, 1991:185). Mzamane has further argued that BC's "tool was culture itself": BC operated on the premise that "culture is both adaptive, offering ways of coping and making sense, and strategic, capable of being mobilised for political, economic and social ends" (1991:193).

BC concentrated on the development of assertiveness among oppressed people, as a first step towards redressing the inequities of the political system. Wally Serote's poem "Ofay-Watcher Throbs-Phase" (1972:58-61) challenges the unrelieved whiteness of political and cultural discourse:

> White people are white people,
> They must learn to listen.

> Black people are black people
> They must learn to talk.[4]

Black Consciousness adherents tried to redress the systematic psychological degradation that had occurred over centuries and to develop a positive identity that contradicted the logic of apartheid and colonialism. The political emphasis on refusing to be silenced and speaking out after the enforced silence of the 1960s is exemplified by Biko's "Frank Talk" articles.[5] Biko grappled with the social psychology of racial oppression, seeking to overcome the political malaise that had developed. As such the focus of Black Consciousness was necessarily upon the oppressed African majority.

Inspired by the independence of Mozambique, SASO and BPC made calls for Viva Frelimo rallies in September 1974. Although they were subsequently banned from holding gatherings, a huge crowd gathered in Durban. Nine SASO and BPC leaders were charged and held in detention during their two-year trial. The state accused them of promoting anti-white feelings and encouraging racial hostility by preparing for violent revolution. It also charged them with conspiring to make, produce, publish or distribute subversive and anti-white utterances, writings, poems, plays and/or dramas (Peterson, 1994:41). The sentences were very severe: six leaders were imprisoned for six-year terms and three leaders were imprisoned for five-year terms (Motlhabi, 1984:148-9). Yet the BC leaders had not actually violated the ban on the rally, which had been announced too late for them to do anything. Although the BCM had not engaged in any direct political confrontation with the state, it suffered harsh reprisals. Yet, it was not until that the Soweto uprising the BCM began to consider using violence to overcome apartheid.

While an Africanist movement such as the (banned) Pan Africanist Congress had focused on building solidarity between African people in South Africa and the peoples of the continent and the diaspora,[6] the BC movement tried to address the specificities of oppression in the early 1970s by building unity among those oppressed South Africans who opposed apartheid:

> we must resist the attempts by protagonists of the bantustan theory to fragment our approach. We are oppressed not as individuals, not as Zulus, Xhosas, Vendas or Indians. We are oppressed because we are black. We must use that very concept to unite ourselves and to respond as a cohesive group (Biko, 1988:113).

In effect BC was based not so much upon the colour of oppressed people, but upon their common condition of oppression arising out of apartheid. BC thus represents a dialectical moment in the political and cultural development of the liberation struggle in South Africa, when oppressed people reconfigured the crude divide-and-rule "ethnic" and "racial" concepts that the regime had constructed to serve white interests. The nature of white discomfort with BC is suggested in Oswald Mtshali's analysis of white reaction to the boundaries constructed by the BC movement:

> This spirit of self-assertion has been sinisterized purposely by the white press, even by our so-called liberal press, because the white people are horrified that the black man, that is the African, the Coloured and the Indian, are coming

> together to form a single united block that will confront and demand freedom from white domination (Chapman, 1982:109).

Biko took an unequivocal position on the question of white participation in the struggle against white supremacy, asserting that the interests of blacks and whites were diametrically opposed:

> The problem is WHITE RACISM and it rests squarely on the laps of white society. The sooner the liberals realise this, the better for us blacks.... White liberals must leave blacks to take care of their own business while they concern themselves with the real evil in our society - white racism (Biko, 1988:37).

Sceptical of the motives of the liberals, Biko rejected the involvement of whites in black politics, which he read as leading, given the structure of society, to domination and protectionism. Implicit in Biko's arguments is the notion that most progressive whites were ideologically closer to other whites than they were to black people. Some progressive white intellectuals treated this as a challenge while others were stung by the BC movement's rejection of their role in the struggle. They refused to accept the necessity for black affirmation, which refusal was itself based on an unwillingness to acknowledge that in "the context of the 1960s and the 1970s, the inevitable consequence of supposedly shared organisations was white domination" (Budlender in Pityana et al, 1991:228).

The BCM sought to overcome the psychological consequences of oppression, to rediscover the value of black culture and to rewrite black history. It was resolutely opposed to any form of collaboration with the institutions of apartheid, to tribalism and to "non-whitism" (ie., acceptance among the oppressed that they were inferior to the whites). BC reintroduced the notion of African humanism, contesting the monopoly and universalism of liberal humanism. Focusing on the reconstruction of the self-image of black people, BC activists rejected the ideologies that made them foreigners in their own land, and asserted the prerogative of people to define themselves and construct their own value systems (Motlhabi, 1984:112). Alluding to the BC cry "Black man, you are on your own" (Biko, 1988:114), Alvarez-Pereyre addresses the implications of oppression for the black writer of the 1970s:

> With a clarity unknown to his elders, he was forced to ask himself the question: what future do I have in this kind of society? He had realised that he was on his own and that his salvation depended entirely on his own initiative (Alvarez-Pereyre, 1984:40).

This explains the focus on consciousness, as the poet-activist Mafika Gwala clarifies:

> In all my writing I have had to strive for a positive negation against the cultural system of the oppressor. I see my role as being that of awakening the consciousness (1989:69-70).

Challenging the silence that had been imposed upon blacks, BC developed a discourse that disarticulated dominant constructions of social relations, value and political boundaries.

Gwala's poem "Gumba, Gumba, Gumba" (Royston, 1973:53-5) reflects his desire to conscientise black people about their existential dilemmas and to advocate appropriate responses to the repression:

> Get up to listen
> To Black screams outside;
> With deep cries, bitter cries.
> That's struggle.
>
> Struggle is when
> You have to lower your eyes
> And steer time
> With your bent voice.
> When you drag along -
> Mechanically.
> Your shoulders refusing;
> Refusing like a young bull
> Not wanting to dive
> Into the dipping tank
> Struggle is keying your tune
> To harmonise with your inside.

The BC movement inspired the production of many plays, art exhibitions, poetry performances and readings. Drama was used because of its performative power, while its ephemeral nature allowed activists to dodge the restrictions on political utterance. Cultural groups flourished, such as the Cultural Committee of the South African Students' Organisation, the Theatre Council of Natal (TECON), People's Experimental Theatre (PET), the Music, Drama, Arts and Literature Institute (MDALI, which means "creator") and the Mihloti Black Theatre Group. The People's Experimental Theatre (PET), which arose in Lenasia in 1973, merged with a Soweto group called Shiqomo (spear) to produce Mthuli Shezi's play *Shanti*. In 1974 and 1975 theatre practitioners were detained under the Terrorism Act and tried on charges of conspiring "to make, produce, publish or distribute subversive and anti-white utterances, writings, plays and dramas". Sipho Sepamla's poem "Now is the time" (1976:69), which is the English version of the slogan *sekunjalo*, captures the spirit of experimentation and confidence that galvanised the youth:

> Now is the time to know words
> Not to shut out their meaning
> Nor to dress them in gaudy clothes
> For there have been words
> Thundering like angry elements
> Simmering like septic wounds
> Or silent as if spooks trotting
> Over disused graves

Organisations addressing literature, performance, painting, sculpture and music flourished: PEYARTA, Creative Youth Organisation, Zamani Arts (Soweto), Bayajula Group

(KwaThema), Guyo Book Club (Sibasa) and Mpumalanga Arts. The writer's organisation Medupe, which was founded in 1977, had two hundred active writers and performers, including Duma Ndlovu and Ingoapele Madingoane. It was banned in the same year. Oral techniques were developed (BC groups explored the vibrant literature that had existed without writing) and musical instruments such as drums and flutes were used during poetry readings (Sole, 1987b:259-60). Madingoane's *africa my beginning* (1979) was popular and influential, and many youths performed it from memory. The influence of the indigenous oral tradition was celebrated. Many BC poets drew upon local idioms, urban patois, township slang and jazz rhythms and the verve and energy of the compositions signified a refusal to be silenced. The BC generation was confident and assertive, and refused to be intimidated by the culture of repression in which it had matured.

Black Consciousness poetry is as much about the development of a public voice as it is about a commitment to social justice. "Never before has there been such a close identification between the mentality of a whole generation and the poetry it writes" (Alvarez-Pereyre, 1984:242). Gwala's poem "Getting off the Ride" (1977:60-68) rejects the language of "non-being" in the words "Black is energetic release from the shackles of Kaffir, Bantu, non-white". The poem seeks to catalyse psychological and societal transformation by urging oppressed people to act in their interests:

> 'Cos I know, shit, I know
> I'm being taken for a ride ...
> I ask again, what is Black?
> Black is when you get off the ride.

James Matthews, in an untitled poem (1974:59), celebrates BCs concern with the need to develop an independent and instrumental role to prosecute the struggle for freedom:

> I
> am the liberator
> no
> white man can liberate me
> only
> a black man can free himself
> from
> white exploitation and oppression

Another work that celebrates a newly liberated consciousness is Sipho Sepamla's poem "My Name Is" (1975:44). The speaker challenges the racial constructs that reinforce the power of the ruling minorities and affirms identities that are more appropriate and meaningful to himself and his community. In a society based on ascription the recognition that subjectivity can be constituted rather than given is liberating. The racial categories that the speaker challenges served the apartheid state as markers of difference: the fictions that the National Party entrenched as law had material effects, restricting or excluding the majority of people from access to resources:

fed in phrases
Coloured
Kaffir
Native
Bantu
African
And now a furious Black
Modidi waSeshego [Poor man of Seshego]
Qaba laseCofimvaba [Illiterate of Cofimvaba]
Say my name is:
Makhonatsohle or [He who is capable]
Mayenzwintandoyakhonkosi [Let your will be done Lord]

Let them know the name
It's been gone too long

An argument of Mattelart's clarifies the complex struggle over discourse embodied in "My Name Is":

> How, from their historically defined positions, can classes, groups and individuals without the official "word" fight against the dispossession of being able to define their own identity, create and imagine another form of uniting amongst themselves, and relating to others? In short, how can they become the often contradictory bearers of another way of thinking about and improving democracy? (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983:17)

Assailed on all sides, writers had to continually relocate their bearings. Sepamla's poem "The land" (1977:17) demonstrates the influence of Africanism in the speaker's assumption of rights of possession. The persona's sense of security is striking: the line "This land defines its textures by me" carries the confidence of a sovereign subject. This is elaborated in the following section:

I am this land that is mine
I have never asked for a portion
there's never been a need to
I am the land.

The speaker ignores the traumatic history of plunder, imperial annexation, the 1913 Land Acts, black spots, artificial homelands, forced removals, and the other manoeuvres of the colonial and apartheid governments to disinherit indigenous people. The speaker's perspective must also be read against the history of land distribution in South Africa, and the detail that the speaker is enthusing about a township plot: although the state eventually conceded to sell township dwellings to longstanding tenants, it concealed the fact that the land on which the matchbox houses stood was not part of the deal. As a result the following stanza is ironic:

I have never had to say
this land is mine
this land has always been me
it is named after me

The reality was much more troubled, as Sankie Nkondo's "The Bivouac" (1990:64-6) and Serote's "There will be a better time" (1982b:142-144) suggest. Produced in exile, these and other poems suggest that the more oppressed people strived to be citizens, the less viable life became for them in apartheid South Africa. "The Bivouac" concludes with an unromantic expression of person and place:

I know who I am
I die in detention every day
am battered to death in Barbeton [sic]
raped on the valleys and hills of goldmines
hung by the neck in Pretoria
buried alive in homeland graves
I am the storm
the suppressed Messiah of
an historic chain...
I know who I am
I am my people
my country.

Serote's "There will be a Better Time" (1982b:142-144) expresses an ordinary South African's understanding of certain fundamentals regarding location. The use of repetition and parallelism make for a resonant performance poem:

we say grand ma and granpa and pa and ma come from here
we are born here, so we are here
here is our land.

no we say
no we say in one voice
no more we say
no more of the bad time.

Serote draws upon the African oral tradition to inform his practice. The use of the oral tradition does not only signify a stylistic shift, for the experimentation with the oral tradition (which began with BC) suggests an ideological basis to the artistic choices many black poets made:

> Serote and his contemporaries like Gwala, and many of the post-Soweto (1976) poets like Dumakude Ndlovu and Ingoapele Madingoane, dip into traditional oral forms. By so doing they show that oral tradition is not and need not be residual; that it can be instrumental in raising cultural awareness and political consciousness. Poetry in South Africa has moved away from the

> page to the stage. It is recited on public occasions, during commemorative gatherings and funeral services and get-togethers of all sorts. It is infused with the traditional spirit of *izibongo* or *lithoko* (Mzamane, 1984:155).

The use of the oral tradition privileges the indigenous tradition against the literary traditions that the conservative liberals tried to impose. Not only were the elite western traditions considered inimical to the interests of oppressed people in South Africa, but there was a commitment to draw upon the neglected and disparaged tradition, in which activists like Jordan (1973), Mzamane (1984), and Serote discerned elements that affirmed the struggle for liberation.

Pallo Jordan's foreword to A.C. Jordan's *Tales from Southern Africa* helps to clarify the reason liberal protest was unattractive to African writers who had experience of cultural traditions in which poets are central to the lives of their communities and who celebrated their poetic craft not as an elite activity but as part of a shared communal practice:

> The ethos of traditional society was enshrined in an oral, legal religious, and literary tradition through which the community transmitted from generation to generation its customs, values, and norms. The poet and storyteller stood at the centre of this tradition, as the community's chroniclers, entertainers, and collective conscience. Their contribution to society was considered of the greatest significance (1973:xi).

Jordan's arguments are supported by Mazisi Kunene's description of the role of the *izimbongi* in the introduction to *Emperor Shaka the Great*:

> They defined social values, celebrating what was historically significant and acting as democratic agents to reaffirm the approval or disapproval of the whole nation (1979:xxv-xxvi).

Like the *izimbongi* or the tellers of *ntsomi*, many South African resistance artists of the 1970s (and 1980s) affirmed their integral connection to the lives of their communities.

Cattle have been a significant feature in the BC writers' constructions of the identity of their work. Three of the four major black poets in English in the 1970s, Mtshali, Serote and Gwala, gave their first collections titles that focused on cattle, which have been central to the lives of black South Africans.

Mtshali's anthology *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum* (1972; first published in 1971) suggests the pathbreaking nature of his anthology: the title unmistakeably locates the poems in English in an African context. The speaker in the title poem "Sounds of a cowhide drum" (1972:71) has a public voice which suggests that his ideological mission is to articulate the experiences of oppressed people. Through the speaker the poet affirms his location within an indigenous oral tradition, celebrating his conjoint roles as orator, historian, seeker and healer:

> Boom! Boom! Boom!
> I am the drum on your dormant soul,
> cut from the black hide of a sacrificial cow.

The rest of the anthology features vignettes of township life. The poet explores the potential of the genre to articulate the evolving identity of black people as they became assertive about their location in society.

The symbol of cattle, traditionally the most prized among the possessions of indigenous African people, also informs the title of Mongane Wally Serote's first poetry collection, *Yakhal'inkomo* (1972). The Nguni title, which both affirms and develops the image that Mtshali evoked, suggests the politics of the poet: while the literal meaning of the title is "the cry of the cow", Serote explains in his preface that the term signifies "the cry of the cattle at the slaughter house" (1972:6). The poet identifies South Africa as a place of violent death from the point of view of the majority of citizens. Further on in the preface Serote clarifies his interpretation of the phrase through a story:

> Dumile, the sculptor, told me that once in the country he saw a cow being killed. In the kraal cattle were looking on. They were crying for their like, dying at the hands of human beings. Yakhal'inkomo....The cattle raged and fought, they became a terror to themselves; the twisted poles of the kraal rattled and shook. The cattle saw blood flow into the ground (1972:6).

Serote then remarks on the narrator's reaction: "Dumile held the left side of his chest and said that is where the cry of the cattle hit him ... Yakhal'inkomo"(1972:6). By referring to the sculptor Dumile Feni, Serote locates himself within a community of committed artists, and suggests the sharing and interdependence that characterises popular-democratic production. Dumile's story suggests a range of responses to oppression that different poems in the collection represent: identification with fellow suffering, mourning, terror, self-destruction and rebellion.

Serote draws on a second example to clarify the theme of "yakhal'inkomo":

> I once saw Mankunku Ngozi blowing his saxophone. Yakhal'inkomo. His face was inflated like a balloon, it was wet with sweat, his eyes huge and red. He grew tall, shrank, coiled into himself, uncoiled and the cry came out of his horn.
>
> This is the meaning of Yakhal'inkomo.

The Cape Town saxophonist Winston Mankunku Ngozi had a popular jazz album in the 1960s. It was called *Yakhal'inkomo*. Thus, in these lines Serote uses the example of another artist to render the situation of black people. Through the reference to music Serote builds upon the allusion to indigenous music that Mtshali made to contextualise his own anthology. In the local oral traditions, music and poetry are not distinct genres, and this influence is evident in the collections of both poets.

Serote's use of Dumile Feni and Winston Mankunku Ngozi to establish his frame of reference is a modernist tactic. The gesture is not only formal but ideological, for they manifest a serious commitment to the liberation struggle in their work. Serote's strategy suggests two types of solidarity: a fundamental assertion of identity with oppressed people, as well as an artistic fellowship in the cause of the liberation. Serote's poems also refer to Nina Simone, Frantz Fanon, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and George Jackson, which suggests that the poet sees his work not only as part of a local movement against apartheid and capitalism but as part of an African and African-American network against oppression.

Serote's reference to jazz music affirms a relationship with a musical paradigm that has roots in the African continent. There are distinct parallels between jazz music, which arose when African slaves in the diaspora were obliged to use western instruments to articulate their feelings, and the work of South African poets who were obliged to use the English language.

In 1977 Mafika Pascal Gwala published an anthology, *Jol'iinkomo* (1977), which, like Serote's first collection, was based on a musical piece by another South African artist, singer Mariam Makeba. In the poem "Getting off the Ride" (1977:60-68) Gwala refers to

> Mariam Makeba's 'Jol'iinkomo' that brings back
> the proud and angry past of my ancestors.

"Jol'iinkomo" refers to a song of encouragement sung by young Xhosa women as young men were preparing to go to war. Like Serote, Gwala interprets a traditional term tactically, explaining that he understands it to mean "bringing the cattle home to the safety of the kraal and the village elders" (1977:6). While Gwala's construction resonates with the title of Mtshali's first collection, it goes further, to challenge the linguistic/ethnic divisions of apartheid: it was unthinkable in the scheme of apartheid for a Zulu-speaking person to appreciate Xhosa culture.

Like Serote and Gwala, James Matthews also locates his poetry by referring to other artists who have struggled against repression. He refers to Miriam Makeba and Nina Simone in his 1974 anthology *Black Voices Shout!*, and dedicates the poem "love and hate" (38) in his 1990 collection, *Poisoned Wells and Other Delights*, to Basil Coetzee. Together with his band Sebenza, Coetzee had revived the jazz hit "Mannenberg", originally made famous by the exiled Abdullah Ebrahim (Dollar Brand).

The conservative liberal critics were unable to deal with the poets' deliberate flouting of "received notions of formal elegance" (McClintock, 1987:247) as they forged "their own precepts out of forms of township speech unfamiliar, and therefore unnerving, to white critics" (1987:247-8). As the conservative liberals grew increasingly proprietorial over the poets' experimentation with the English medium the poets fought back. Mafika Gwala responded to the academic A.G. Ullyatt's criticism (1977:51-62) of black writers' use of English, arguing that "there *are* times when the black writer's language has brilliantly described the black man's alienation" (1984:49), one of the most powerful examples of which is Serote's "Black Bells" (1972:62). Gwala rejected the formal prescriptions of the liberal-conservatives:

> We are bound to the demands of our own historical context, so that, while our English medium is being shaped by our history, "command of the English language" becomes a myth of the first order. We have expressed ourselves accordingly (1984:49).

Gwala's own poems contain confident and challenging games with language. Sitas observes that Gwala's English "is consciously 'donnered' by people's everyday speech-genres, machine rhythms and localisms" (1989a:44). Resistance writers had little interest in serving the goals of the dominant, and were more concerned to use English to serve their own ideological goals. In the process, as Alvarez-Pereyre has argued, a writer like Gwala "contributes so much to its renewal" (1984:239-240). In "Just to say..." (1977:69) Gwala challenged the prescriptions of the liberal-conservative establishment. Like Serote in the *Yakhal'inkomo* (1972) and *Tsetlo* collections, Gwala drew upon an African-American idiom to articulate his rejection of liberal-conservative demands and pretensions:

> There'll always be those who want me to act
> after their accepted fashions;
> those who'll expect me to pull a smile
> just to please their vanities;
> those who'll wish I should agree with their clawed existence;
> those who'll say I'm not polite
> jes because their grabby way
> ain't gonna be my stays,
> and their swags don't fool me.

Rejecting the culturally-determined prescriptions of the conservative liberal intellectuals regarding content, style and standards, BC writers like Gwala, Matthews and Serote challenged their right to patrol township culture. Deciding that western literary language was not relevant to their needs, they wrote poems "trampling on every propriety of the English language" (McClintock, 1987:247). Sipho Sepamla was quite resolved that irrespective of the response of the critics, "if the situation requires broken or 'murdered' English, then for God's sake one must do just that" (Chapman, 1982:117).

The bold persuasiveness of Biko's use of the English language had an enormous influence on young blacks, and there was growing recognition among the writers that literary discourse was a power to be seized. Aware of the role of English as one of the two dominant languages in a highly divided society, black resistance writers qualified their use of it. Experimenting with "nonstandard" English and colloquialisms, they adapted the first language of 9% of the population (National Education Policy Investigation, 1992:22) to express urban life and the interaction of black people drawn together from different areas. They used the medium to affirm their commitment to liberation, engaging with the reigning discourses on the basis that to inhabit a language is to appropriate it.

The impact of the Bantu Education Act, as well as the other structural inequities of apartheid, compounded the problems of the relevance, legitimacy and effectiveness of this language. However, while the Bantu Education Act had the unintended effect of motivating black writers to insist upon using the English language, the ideology and conduct of the

conservative liberals freed them from the hegemony of English high culture. Instead they recognised that the onus was upon themselves to understand their cultural history and their relationship to the other South African cultures and languages in order to liberate themselves from the supremacist, chauvinistic ideologies that have tended to govern the language. This was also necessary if the English language was to serve the development of the emerging society:

> Language is not inherently oppressive: its role is defined by the people who wield it and the social forces which act upon it. And as dominated people become conscious of their power to change their environment and hence change themselves, they struggle to transform language into a weapon of liberation. They strive to create a means of communication that becomes a carrier of a new culture of confidence (Meintjies, 1989:16).

Writing in English did reduce their access to black audiences. One way in which BC addressed this was to focus on the performance medium, eg., drama, poetry, song. Mbongeni Ngema has been a particularly successful exponent of multilingual dramatic performances. Sitas describes the development of performance poetry "initially among small groups of black militants, to move in larger and larger concentric circles outwards to reach the black working class" (1989a:43).

While "Black Consciousness provided the initial impetus in the rejection of art as an aesthetic indulgence" (Patel, 1984:85), some BC writers were sometimes driven to unnecessary extremes. An untitled poem by Matsemela Manaka (1986:16) challenges the excessive emphasis on form that has characterised conservative liberal aesthetics (which had been derived from an imported New Criticism), suggesting that the criteria that critics like Ullyatt presumed and never specified had to be reviewed by resistance writers:

> Let us create and talk about life
> Let us not admire the beauty
> But peruse the meaning
> Let art be life
> Let us not eye the form
> But read the content
> Let creativity be a portrait of one's life

The conservative liberal construct of protest literature was swept aside by the impact of the BCM on resistance literature. Faced with the political assertiveness of BC literature, the conservative liberal critics clearly preferred its predecessor. Evidence of the ideological investment that conservative liberals made in "protest literature" is apparent in their continued refusal to accept the developments that were occurring in black poetry. As late as 1987 Stephen Watson was still bewailing the decline of what he termed the "well-established tradition of black protest poetry" (1990:93):

> "black" poetry ... has also been particularly ill-served by its critics. Amongst the many evasive lines of argument produced by the latter was the belief that there had been a truly significant reorientation in "black" poetry in the seventies ... [which] became, after the Soweto uprising of 1976, a poetry of

> resistance directed exclusively towards a black audience and its mobilization. Embedded in such arguments was invariably the belief, equally often unexamined, that this re-orientation registered an advance (1990:85).

Watson's arguments suggest that his objections were closely linked to the diminution of the conservative liberal hegemony over resistance poetry.[7] In the earlier writings of Frantz Fanon about colonial machinations there is clarification of the reasons for the conservative liberals' dismay at the eclipse of what they understood as "protest writing":

> as the objectives and the methods of the struggle for liberation become more precise [t]hemes are completely altered; in fact, we find less and less of bitter, hopeless recrimination and less also of that violent, resounding, florid writing which on the whole serves to reassure the occupying power. The colonialists have in the former times encouraged these modes of expression and made their existence possible. Stinging denunciations, the exposing of distressing conditions and passions which find their outlet in expression are in fact assimilated by the occupying power in a cathartic process. To aid such processes is in a certain sense to avoid their dramatization and to clear the atmosphere (1963:239).

By trying to appropriate, contain or deprecate the emergent literature conservative liberals like Watson sought to secure their own interests, effectively enacting neocolonial relations in the cultural sphere. Owing to their ideological position, the conservative liberals could not accept that the developments in black poetry represented a progression. The way in which conservative liberal critics like Watson have received resistance literature unintentionally confirms Biko's recognition that "the function of the apparatus of hegemony is to organise the cohesion of the dominant groups... while preventing the solidarity of the emergent groups" (Mattelart, 1983:30). However, Michael Chapman acknowledged the impact of BC on South African literature:

> Theirs is a poetry which has been instrumental not only in re-establishing a tradition of black South African writing, but in prompting serious, often uncomfortable questioning by writers and critics alike as to the value of, and the appropriate responses to, literature in a racially turbulent society (1984:183).

Writing at about the same time as Chapman, Alvarez-Pereyre addressed the specific way in which the writer-activists challenged oppression and the political and cultural hegemonies:

> Left to themselves and under the pressure of circumstances, the young poets led poetry out of the ghetto in which the purists and the traditionalist anthologies had imprisoned it, and they gave it a new life (1984:40).

Relying defensively on a mechanistic opposition of politics and aesthetics the conservative liberals consistently failed to recognise the beginnings of a counter-hegemonic culture in BC. The BCM marked the beginning of a profound shift in the explicit link between culture and politics in South African literature:

> since the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement there has never been any question of separating writing from actual political activity; both are demanded of the writer simultaneously. Not only must their literary works foster the struggle, but they must take upon themselves the revolutionary tasks of any other section of the community (Watts, 1989:48).

The BCM's attention to the development of oppressed solidarity was not just around racial or ethnic differences: it was also beginning to address the issue of ideological differences. Biko expressed hope for unity among the different South African liberation organisations:

> I would like to see groups like ANC, PAC and the Black Consciousness Movement deciding to form one liberation group and it is only, I think, when black people are so dedicated and so united in their cause that we can effect the greatest result (Wilson in Pityana et al, 1991:66).

The challenge for the BC movement was to translate its ideological and cultural power into political action, but this proved difficult owing to the size and orientation of the organisation, the serious effects of repression, the rise of the labour movement and the revived influence of the ANC.

While Biko had been alert to the significance of the unity of the oppressed across language, ethnic or racial classification, he did not recognise the significance of class solidarity (or the differences between white liberals and radicals). However, Mafika Gwala, who played a formative role in the BCM, has consistently raised class issues in his poems and his analyses. In many poems Gwala asserts the unity of the oppressed through an affirmation of the working class and the *lumpen proletariat*, as the example of "Afrika at a Piece" (1982:44) demonstrates:

> Our history will be written
> at the factory gates
> at the unemployment offices
> in the scorched queues of dying mouths

Gwala's unifying mission is also apparent in "Children of Nonti" (1977:46-8), which is an Africanist affirmation of pride and dignity as well as being expressive of BC from a working class point of view (Sitas, 1989a:44). In this, as in many other BC poems, reference is made to urban working class living conditions, poverty, and the oppressiveness of the various laws designed to exclude black people.

The language of black male redemption in the statements of Biko (and other BC activists) arise, to some extent, out of the discursive style that prevailed. Biko was using English as a second-language, and although his command of it was formidable, he did not address the inherent sexism in the language, the practices of the state, the oppressed, or even in his own behaviour, focused as he was on dealing with racial oppression. However, Fatima Dike's play *The First South African* (1979) is a powerful work which addresses the impact of racial classification on the lives of a family in Langa. The subtheme addresses the problem of

patriachal presumption: the main character Zwelinzima Jama's exploitative treatment of his mother Freda Jama, his lover Thembi Hlazo, and other women is contrasted with the strength and dignity of Freda Jama and Thembi Hlazo, and the egalitarian commitment of his step-father, Austin Jama, to Freda Jama.

Often missed in analyses of BC is the influence of repression on its development: ie., the impact of harassment, restrictions, bannings, imprisonment, torture, forced exile and deaths in detention. Many activists paid a high price for their ideals. In 1972 Mthuli Shezi, a playwright and vice-chair of the Black Peoples' Convention, intervened when black women were being molested by a white railway worker. The molester subsequently killed Shezi by pushing him under a passing train.

Onkgopotse Tiro was killed in a parcel-bomb explosion while in exile in Botswana. In 1972 the University of the North student leader had been expelled for challenging discrimination in the educational and political systems. During a university assembly Tiro had argued that a unitary education system was essential, that the white domination of black institutions was unacceptable, and that blacks had to be treated equally and consulted on issues such as the medium of instruction and the curriculum. Turfloop students responded to his expulsion by going on boycott and the university was closed. Black universities across the country, a Durban technical college, and some colleges of education went on boycott. The liberal white universities launched a "Free Education" campaign (Christie, 1985: 235-6).

Serote's poem "The Breezing Dawn of the New Day" (1982b:138-141) celebrates the assertiveness of the youth who were responsible for the Soweto uprising:

> some day has gone and left some children here
> who ask and ask and so teach us how to talk and fix an eye on any other eye

The Soweto uprising, which began as a students' revolt against the imposition of Afrikaans in June 1976, developed into direct confrontation between township dwellers and the police. About 600 people died and about 2300 people were injured. The uprising was not directly linked to any BC organisation, although it was "a Black Consciousness manifestation" (Motlhabi, 1984:151). Three general causes are attributed: the educational crisis, underground African National Congress involvement, and the economic factors of unemployment, industrial strikes and the recession (Lodge, 1983:330-336).

While 1976 was a decisive year of struggle against the apartheid state, in the poem "Nineteen Seventy-Six" (Ndaba, 1986:68) Oupa Thando Mthimkulu focuses on the suffering that was experienced:

> Nineteen Seventy-Six
> You stand accused
> Of deaths
> Imprisonments
> Exiles
> And detentions.

Cabinet notebooks released by the State Archives in November 1996 revealed that in a cabinet meeting less than two months after the start of the Soweto uprising of June 1976, Jimmy Kruger, the National Party government's Minister of Justice, Police and Prisons, called for the police to kill yet more black people.[8] As Serote wrote at the time in the poem "Behold Mama, Flowers": "words are known to take people's lives" (1978:45).

A striking characteristic of the BCM has been that it was in effect a racial and a generational challenge to the Afrikaner Broederbond, the intellectual cabal which controlled the National Party, and which influenced the development of "Bantu education" and the "tribal" universities:

> it is ironical that this generation of black youth, the first to be educated in the "virtues" of apartheid at the "tribal colleges", freed itself from white hegemony to develop the most systematic ideological challenge to apartheid itself (Fatton, 1986:64).

In August 1976 virtually the entire BCP and BPC leadership in King Williamstown was detained under the Terrorism Act. Thenjiwe Mtintso, a journalist, was picked up with Biko in August 1976 and tortured until she was more dead than alive (Stubbs in Biko, 1988:218). Mamphela Ramphele was summarily deported to rural Tzaneen. Steve Biko suffered repeated harassment and detention, and was eventually tortured to death by security police in September 1977.[9] Biko's death sparked a massive outcry both within and outside the country and he came to symbolise all those who died in detention. Notorious at the time for his response to the killing of Steve Biko, "*Dit laat my koud*" [It leaves me cold], Kruger was nevertheless capable of showing surprising sensivity to what he considered the open threat of "Black Power poetry" (Emmett in Chapman, 1982:175). The validity of Kruger's concerns are confirmed by the fact that although the main period of Black Consciousness was over by the late 1970s, the movement continued to exert a very strong influence on cultural developments. In October 1977 all BC organisations were banned and many activists were imprisoned, banned, killed or driven into exile.

5.2 Satire against the apartheid regime and the liberals

The influence of Black Consciousness is apparent in a range of satirical poems that appeared in the early 1970s. Satire refers to a form of writing in which wit is used to expose a person, object, situation or issue to criticism. Several poets chose to experiment with satire because the subtlety of the medium of poetry gave them scope to criticise the repressive state without exposing themselves. Many of the satirical poems have not only challenged various aspects of life under the apartheid regime but they have done so in ways that transgress the discursive

norms and proprieties of the conservative liberal literary establishment, as they register "a certain unofficial view of the world" (Bakhtin, 1991:188).

Wally Serote's poem "City Johannesburg" (1972:13) challenges the might of South Africa's largest city by referring pointedly to the oppression upon which it has been built.[10] The framing lines of the poem are significant. "City Johannesburg" begins as follows:

> This way I salute you:
> My hand pulses to my back trousers pocket
> Or into my inner jacket pocket
> For my pass, my life,
> Jo'burg City

The poem concludes with:

> Jo'burg City, you are dry like death,
> Jo'burg City, Johannesburg, Jo'burg City.

The poem is an ironic panegyric (praise poem) that draws upon the oral praise tradition to challenge the oppression upon which the wealth of the most powerful city on the continent has been built. Reduced to labour units, most African workers had no place in the city once they expended their daily quota of labour. A battery of legislation, the group Areas Act, the Influx control laws, the Pass laws, as well as curfews all conspired to shunt them to far-flung and poorly serviced dormitory townships that have been the shadow side of the glamorous city. In the opening lines, the poor and harrassed worker has no "Bayete!" (the Zulu praise of "Hail!" that acknowledges the powerful) in response to the commands of the apartheid functionary, instead he searches feverishly for his passbook. The irony of the framing lines suggest the inversion of praise, for Johannesburg was unworthy of the regard of African people.

While the resistance poets tended to reject the discourses of the state and the conservative-liberals, they were skilled at parodying them. Sipho Sepamla's "To Whom it May Concern" (Chapman and Dangor, 1982:120) exposes the equivocating language of the apartheid bureaucracy. Sepamla draws upon a host of official statements and behaviours, which he shows to be absurd: for instance, "The Native (Abolition of Pass and Co-ordination of Documents) Act of 1952", notwithstanding its appellation, increased the repressiveness of the existing legislation. The opening lines are laden with irony:

> Bearer
> Bare of everything but particulars
> Is a Bantu
> The language of a people in southern Africa

The identical rhyme (*rime riche*) in the first two words serves to emphasize the contradiction that has defined the experience of African people in South Africa: at the receiving end of apartheid policy, "Bearer" is bereft of everything but his institutionalised subservience. By appropriating and reframing apartheid discourse Sepamla subverts its legitimacy.

The speaker is an unexpected construction, and quite a perverse one for a Black Consciousness poet. However, Sepamla uses the speaker to expose the absurd authority of the petty bureaucrats of apartheid, as is clear in the speaker's reference to

> the Urban Natives Act of 1925
> Amended often
> To update it to his sophistication

Conscious of the corrupt nature of the legislation he is citing, the speaker tries to dissemble with a patronising lie that is compounded by the equivocating injunction "He may roam freely within a prescribed area". Ruling class stereotypes and lies about the "other" are parodied in the conclusion of the poem:

> The remains of R/N 417181
> Will be laid to rest in peace
> On a plot
> Set aside for Methodist Xhosas
> A measure also adopted
> At the express request of the Bantu
>
> In anticipation of any faction fight
> Before the Day of Judgement.

These statements echo the state's divide-and-rule strategy. The state sought to secure white supremacy by fragmenting the oppressed majority in a manner that owed more to opportunism than to any half-logic, for the lines of division were not really "ethnic" or "linguistic". Contradicting the logic of its own "homeland" policy, the government created not one but two "nation states", Ciskei and Transkei, among the Xhosa speakers, partly because it feared their numbers and militance. The structural effects of such policies have to be critically addressed by each person among the millions of people it was intended to divide and weaken. To counter the divisive legacy of apartheid, Sepamla uses humour to encourage an atmosphere of ease and openness. "Laughter liberates not only from external censorship but first of all from the great interior censor" (Bakhtin, 1991:94).

The title "To Whom it May Concern" is drawn from bureaucratic discourse, and constitutes an ironic comment on the lack of concern within the apartheid state for the plight of the people who were pushed around. This is a point that *Asinamali* (Ngema, 1985) makes, with lively caricatures of ponderous, vindictive and drowsy bureaucrats, as it condemns the lengthy process required to secure even a short-term pass.

Sepamla's poem "Words, Words, Words" (1984:104) mocks the lexicon of the apartheid state, in which "natives" became "Bantus" and eventually "plurals". Sepamla exposes the genealogy of the lies, showing the transition from the self-serving imperialist term "tribe" to the apartheid construct of "nations". The terms were used selectively to divide black people on the basis of a sense of ethnicity derived from linguistic "difference". The pronoun is deliberately blurred: the "We" in the first line below is used ironically, and is more circumscribed in subsequent references:

We don't speak of tribal wars anymore
we simply say faction fights
there are no tribes around here
only nations

As with "To Whom it May Concern", Charles Ngema's "New Labour Bills" (Evill and Kromberg, 1989:37-38) criticizes apartheid in a parody of "The Lord's Prayer". The poem begins with the line "Botha'lezi is my shepherd; I am in want", and continues in similar vein:

He leadeth me besides still factories in Isitebe,
He arouseth my doubt of his political direction

Such anti-official intertexts were part of the counter-monologic challenge to authoritarian practices.

The Ngema, Mtwa and Simon play *Woza Albert!* (1983) uses satire to challenge the Christian nationalist ideology of the National Party government. Through the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk the government had manipulated the Bible to legitimate apartheid. Contesting the cultural spaces that the reactionary forces monopolised, *Woza Albert!* (Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, 1983) posits the second coming in the form of a black messiah: *Morena* (which means "God" in seSotho) resurrects the opponents and victims of apartheid. Assorted apartheid functionaries like P.W. Botha, police officers (the security police, in particular), prison warders, employers and South African Broadcasting Co-operation newscasters are ridiculed as the play confronts the Pass Laws, influx control, worker exploitation, prison conditions, racial chauvinism and state propaganda. To encourage revolt the passivity of a range of naive characters is portrayed with humour and understanding.

Several other poets also used the hierarchical discourse of the imposed religious ideology to challenge the state. Oswald Mtshali's poem "The Master of the House" (1972:55) has a speaker who is as ironic as he is servile in his rendition of feudal notions of power ("Master", a term in common use in the Cape, suggests residual slave relations). Like Serote's poem "The Actual Dialogue" (1972:9) "The Master of the House" subtly raises the point of addressing the boss at all:

Master, I am a stranger to you,
but will you hear my confession?

I am a faceless man
who lives in the backyard
of your house

In taking the unusual initiative to address his partner's employer, the speaker hints at the deeper problems that have characterised apartheid society: monopolies on the ownership of property; the complicity of middle-class minorities with inhumane laws such as those that separated urban domestic workers from their partners, families and communities; the abject status of domestic workers, many of whom have received poor wages and food, coupled with

long working hours and little rest or leave. It was not just the pass laws that separated couples and families. Employers have tended to prefer domestic workers to be on call, which necessitates the accommodation of workers on the premises. This meant that domestic workers have generally been forced to live alone while maintaining a family elsewhere, in the townships, rural areas or shacks. Subtly, in words such as "confession", "steal" and "flees", the poem exposes the criminalisation and the dehumanisation of millions of poor people, who have a more ancient and legitimate claim to the land than the master, yet are unable to share their scant living-quarters with their partners, much less their children and other family. Life, labour and living spaces have been very closely controlled with few basic rights for domestic workers:

> I am the nocturnal animal
> that steals through the fenced lair
> to meet my mate,
> and flees at the break of dawn
> before the hunter and the hounds
> run me to ground.

The images of "faceless man" and "nocturnal animal" suggest the degradation experienced by the partner of the domestic worker, even though he has managed to evade detection. The speaker's description of himself as an animal, from the point of view of the employer, demonstrates his abject status. It also confirms that the employer can never be addressed by this non-person, without serious repercussions. By raising the possibility of confronting the employer the poem seems to bear out Alvarez-Pereyre's assessment that

> Mtshali can be said to be, *fundamentally*, more subversive than he seems: we find in his work a series of messages addressed to fellow Africans (1984:179).

The speaker's willingness to confront his partner's employer, however obsequiously (and whether in an imagined tableau, a rehearsal, or in actuality), signifies his refusal to allow the situation to continue (although the poem does not develop this impulse). Instead, by counterpoint, the speaker's partner prefers to avoid any confrontation with the inhumane system:

> Sweetie! eat and be satisfied now,
> Tomorrow we shall be gone.

Nevertheless, the poem impells sympathy for the speaker's position.

Addressing the construction of personae such as those in "The Master of the House" and "The Actual Dialogue" (1972:9), Jane Watts has argued that

> [t]he adoption of the humble yes-baas role is not a matter of choice, or personality or belief: it is not the refuge of a passive, subservient nature. It is a prerequisite for survival: the compulsory disguise both for the placid and the rebellious, if they are going to have any hope of staying out of prison (1989:26).

If Watts is responding to the strategies adopted in these poems, her argument has validity. However, the spirit of the poems of Mtshali, Gwala, Matthews, Sepamla, Wa Nthodi and Serote go far beyond the issue of survival. Mtshali, Sepamla, and Serote in particular, address the problem directly, with tactical and artistic ingenuity.

Wally Serote's "The Actual Dialogue" (1972:9) and Motshile wa Nthodi's "South African Dialogue" (Chapman and Dangor, 1982:95-6) appear to be in response to the Vorster government's propaganda regarding its "dialogue" with the economically and militarily captive heads of African states and "homeland" leaders. Unlike Wa Nthodi's poem, which is a satirical demonstration of how domestic workers ("kitchen boys") were used as bearers of (inane) communication among "baas" and the neighbouring "baas", Serote's compact poem goes much further to render a text of the unsaid between black servant and white employer:

Do not fear Baas.
It's just that I appeared
And our faces met
In this black night that's like me.
5 Do not fear -
We will always meet
When you do not expect me.
I will appear
In the night that's black like me.
10 Do not fear -
Blame your heart
When you fear me -
I will blame my mind
When I fear you
15 In the night that's black like me.
Do not fear Baas,
My heart is as vast as the sea
And your mind as the earth.
It's awright Baas,
20 Do not fear.

The patently inaccurate title, the laboured repetitions, the inappropriate tone, and the grovelling persona of "The Actual Dialogue" seem designed to provoke assorted apartheid or conservative-liberal stereotypes regarding black workers or poets. At the same time the improbable situation of the subordinate comforting the superior as well as the use of the word "Baas" risks alienating two significant groups of intended readers (of Serote's 1972 anthology *Yakhal'inkomo*): black intellectuals and Black Consciousness activists, and sympathetic white intellectuals.

That the poet takes such a risk offers a clue to the tactic behind the inconsistencies. The "good native" who knows his place offers a neat cover for the challenges and threats that are woven into the statements directed at the "baas", eg., the references to blame (lines 11-14) seem to be unduly even-handed (given the one-sidedness of repression in South Africa at the

time) until the counterweight is delivered (in lines 17-18), which alludes to the worst fear of the ruling minority: the substantive numerical superiority of black people. It emerges that the statements are not intended to balance each other for the poet does not subscribe to the balancing equations of liberalism, which tend to apportion blame equally in a severely unbalanced society. Rather, the later lines (17-18) suggest that the earlier lines (6-18) express criticism of the irrational fears the majority have for the tiny minority. This clarifies the significance of the much repeated phrase of reassurance ("Do not fear Baas"), which occupies five of the twenty lines, and which starts and concludes the poem: the implication, in a police state, of such excessive repetition is that the opposite is signified, ie., "Baas" has every reason to be afraid.

Such a reading is supported by the curious title, "The Actual Dialogue". There is only one speaker so, notwithstanding the noun, the influence of the adjective and the definite article, the title is inaccurate. There is no dialogue in the poem. The extravagant layering of improbabilities parallels the Prime Minister B.J. Vorster's claim that his government had embarked on a policy of *detente* (dialogue) with other African states. So foreign was the process to the South African government that it was given the gloss of a French diplomatic expression. Or perhaps the apartheid government had deemed it unnecessary to agitate its supporters, hence the (charade of) dialogue had to be concealed in sophisticated jargon. The government made similar claims of engaging in dialogue with "homeland" leaders, to the derision of activists who challenged the possibility that the government could have meaningful dialogue with servile, unrepresentative puppets. This is clear at an intermediate level of the poem's operation, where the attitude of the cringing speaker suggests a bantustan leader's anxiety to assure the white government of his loyalty, an allusion to the feudal relations that the National Party tried to institutionalise.[11]

A further facet of parodic utterance is that it enables the destabilisation of the dominant through raids "across the borders of discourse" (Ashcroft in Tiffin & Lawson, 1994:38). Through the use of parody "The Actual Dialogue" reproduces the discursive universe of the government while exposing its ideological operation, and thus challenging the illusion that there has been dialogue. Reflexively, it is the poem that comes closest to dialogue, through the speaker's engagement with the unspoken fears of most whites at the time.[12]

The submissive character in "The Actual Dialogue" is the creation of one of the most forthright poets of the period, the better to expose the system, and to threaten it. This is accomplished by a dexterous use of the repression to construct space for the articulation of ideas of resistance. "The Actual Dialogue" implicitly contradicts Watts' assumption of strategic compromise by exploiting the gestures of subservience to demonstrate how resistance may yet be articulated.

The next few poems are concerned more with the actions of different groups of liberals than the state, although the state could not be fully excluded from consideration. Chris van Wyk's poem "Beware of White Ladies when Spring is Here" (1979:28) deals with white liberal women and black township residents:

> They plant their seeds in our eroded slums
> cultivating charity in our eroded hearts

making our slums look like floral Utopias.
Beware!
Beware of seeds and plants.
They take up your oxygen
and they take up your time
and let you wait for blossoms
and let you pray for rain
and you forget about equality
and blooming liberation
and that you too deserve chemise dresses
and pretty sandals that show your toes.
Beware of white ladies
when spring is here
for they want to make of you
a xerophyte.

The poem addresses an argument raised in Biko's 1970 "Frank Talk" article "Black Souls in White Skins?", where he argues that the presence of white people

> removes the focus of attention from essentials and shifts it to ill-defined philosophical concepts that are both irrelevant to the black man and merely a red herring across the track (1988:37).

However, the poem goes further, addressing the liberals' superficial notions of reform with the hard-earned confidence that had been developing within the resistance movement. The poem addresses the mixed feelings with which the oppressed respond to the attractive but inconsequential offerings of privileged do-gooders, which confuse and distract the unwary from their primary aim of liberation. The thread of mock paranoia that runs through the poem has a wicked purpose: the better to taunt the liberal critics who have complained incessantly and uncomprehendingly about the grimness of resistance poetry.

The poet's confident treatment of the suspicions of oppressed people explains the success of the poem despite its appearance in a desperate and polarised time. However, the relaxed style does not signify any concessions to the values of liberalism: there is a substantive challenge to conservative-liberal conceptions of audience, content and style.

Van Wyk's concluding caution that liberal intervention merely helps the oppressed adapt to the conditions of their oppression (expressed through the image of the plant-lover) rather than deal with the problem challenges both liberals and oppressed people.

In "They Do It" (1972:23), Serote offers a model for a diplomatic though assertive response to the political and social contradictions of black intellectuals who interact with white liberals. "They Do It" echoes Biko's treatment of the problem of tokenism in the "Frank Talk" article "Black Souls in White Skins?":

> the black-white circles are almost always a creation of white liberals. As a testimony to their claim of complete identification with the blacks, they call a

> few "intelligent and articulate" blacks to "come around for tea at home", where all present ask each other the same old hackneyed question "How can we bring about change in South Africa?" The more such tea-parties one calls, the more of a liberal he is and the freer he shall feel from the guilt that harnesses and binds his conscience. Hence he moves around his white circles - whites-only hotels, beaches, restaurants and cinemas - with a lighter load, feeling that he is not like the rest of the others (1988:36).

Serote uses parody in "They Do It" to criticise the liberal academic milieu, reproving the petit bourgeois charades of integration which left the race and class bases unchallenged:

> They have everything. Earthly.
> Their ways are woven wide,
> Only small 'cause they're the same;
> There's a party
> There's a study group
> Or some such thing;
> What's important is
> They meet;
> The same people everyday
> At every other house or occasion,
> The same people; tea and cheese-cake, or coffee,
> Or milo: or whatever you want.
> To change the monotony,
> They dapple the house
>
> With the black of an Indian or the black like mine,
> Then they smile.

The disaffection suggested by the title is neatly countered in the simple inclusiveness and directedness of the final line, which demands substantive action from both black and white intellectuals. This is a significant development from the alienation and lethargy suggested by most of the poem and the (ironic) title. Like Van Wyk (and unlike the Vorster government), Serote also addresses both parties directly, as the only way of dealing with the contradiction:

> See?
> To repeat is when I continue
> Poetry of monotony
> So let's stop, we need a change.[13]

In "What's in this Black Shit?" (1972:16) and "A Poem on Black and White" (1982b:55) Serote parodies the formality and impersonality of the academic essay to challenge the prescriptions of the conservative liberal academic establishment regarding the style and content of South African literature.

"What's in this Black Shit?" is a double-sided attack, on the racist epithet, and on intellectuals who made a fetish of sanitising cultural expression while the majority of South Africans have

been subjected to appalling conditions. Parodying the style of serious, disinterested and "objective" intellectual inquiry, Serote mocks intellectual hypocrisy by focusing upon a patently "unacademic" subject, suggesting that if privileged South Africans can make a good living in the midst of oppression and underdevelopment, then poetic discourse and intellectual work is not too precious to address such issues:

> It's not the steaming little rot
> In the toilet bucket,
> It is the upheaval of the bowels
> Bleeding and coming out through the mouth
> And swallowed back,
> Rolling in the mouth,
> Feeling its taste and wondering what's next like it.

The persona is insistent about the content of his subject: "Now I'm talking about this", is followed by suggestive elaboration: "This shit can take the form of action", which leads to ironic self-affirmation: "I'm learning to pronounce this 'Shit' well", which is reinforced by the meticulous conclusion: "That's what's in this black 'Shit'". The poet will not tolerate any evasions of the subject. In contrast to "The Actual Dialogue" (1972:9), "What's in this Black 'Shit'" sets out to offend intellectuals, both black and white, into recognition of their complicity (whether conscious or unconscious) with conservative liberal values.

Several poems register problems with the material distance produced by cultural and class factors. In "The Uprising" (1990:20-22) Zinjiva Winston Nkondo's speaker describes the polarisation of South African literature in metapoetic terms, beginning with the words "here is a bare trench/ of metaphors" which is contrasted to the "singing of broken lips". This characterises the postmodernist crisis of the postcolonial speaker of Serote's "Black Bells" (1972:62), who struggles to express him/herself in a genre patrolled by neocolonial authorities:

> AND,
> words
> Make pain
> Like poverty can make pain.
> Words,
> WORDS,
> Like thought are elusive,
> Like life,
> Where everybody is trapped.
> I wonder who trapped me,
> For I am trapped,
> Twice

The lines "For I am trapped / Twice" suggest that not only is the persona trapped by the regime, but when s/he tries to articulate that experience in the medium of English s/he becomes ensnared for the second time. By dramatising the crisis the poet tries to fracture the monolithic and monologic discourses of power. Nevertheless, "Black Bells" is the final poem

in a collection that demonstrates that Serote, among other resistance writers, did not believe that his discursive options were limited only to knowing how to curse like Caliban.

The speaker in "Black Bells" registers a contradiction that many resistance poets experienced: while they felt compelled to produce poetry, they found the discourse to be a trap. The poets struggle just to articulate their alienating and disempowering experiences. Such a problem could not be resolved internally, for any literary resolution to systematic oppression could only be very marginal, temporal, individual and fictional, as Serote's *No Baby Must Weep* (1975:60-61) suggests in a longing for transcendence:

> i can say
> i
> i have gone beyond the flood now
> i left word on the flood
> it echoes
> in the depth the width
> i am beyond the flood

This is followed after a few lines by a wishful, if somewhat self-defeating, notion: "one day the word will break".

An early poem by Oswald Mtshali, "High and Low" (1971:27) offers a reflexive critique of the vulnerability of the resistance poets' constructions of their subject positions in relation to their existential crises:

> Black is the hole of the poet,
> a mole burrowing from no entrance to no exit.

Poems such as "High and Low" and "Black Bells" register profound doubt about the value of poetry in the "slaughter house" (Serote, 1972:6). The poets seem more susceptible to despair if they construct their speakers only as individual voices. That the wholesale adoption of the first-person pronoun (a convention that predominates the literature of western high culture) can have political ramifications is borne out by Keorapetse Kgositsile's poem "Mandela's Sermon" (Soyinka, 1975:204), which warns about artistic choices:

> False gods killed the poet in me. Now
> I dig graves
> With artistic precision.

In "Words, Words, Words" (1984:104) Sepamla points out that if politicians believe they have claims to "poetic licence" then the poets, in turn, have to be politically adept, for oppressed people cannot remain subject to "the word of a merciless civilisation"[14]:

> we are talking of words
> words tossed around as if
> denied location by the wind
> we mean those words some spit others grab

dress them up for the occasion
fling them on the lap of an audience
we are talking of those words
that stalk our lives like policemen
words that no dictionary can embrace
words that change sooner than seasons

we mean words
that spell out our lives
words, words, words
for there's a kind of poetic licence
doing the rounds in these parts.

Another poem by Sepamla, "In Search of Roots" (1984:106), suggests a cynicism attendant upon the "success" of the satirical literature:

we will have to laugh hard
even if it is at our own illusions

The poet-activists grew increasingly concerned that their poetry was tolerated by the regime because it was not much of a threat, but served as the classic petit bourgeois safety valve, defusing rather than increasing pressure against the system. As the political situation worsened, and they were obliged to ask more demanding questions about their identities, their social projects and their relationships with their audiences, resistance writers tended to give up the margins of satire for more politically-engaged work.

Notes:

1. The source is Wally Serote's *Behold Mama, Flowers* (1978:49).

2. The generic use of "man" for people is characteristic of Black Consciousness. Like many movements of its time, it tended to be oblivious to gender oppression.

3. The source is Nkosinathi Biko, SABC-TV (10.9.97).

4. An ofay-watcher is an African-American Black Power term for a community watchdog.

5. Refer to Biko: *I Write What I Like* (1988).

6. The PAC, which has its origins in the Youth League of the African National Congress, also arose in response to a crisis involving the perceived loss of African identity. It differs from the BCM in its belief in the necessity for an undiluted African nationalism. The PAC has focused on the development of African unity out of the conviction that Africans can only be liberated by an African movement.

7. The situation was exacerbated by the appearance of publications such as *Staffrider* in 1978.

8. Kruger is reported to have made the following statement: "*Minister stel voor dat hierdie beweging gebreek moet word en die polisie moet miskien 'n bietjie meer drasties en hardhanding moet optree wat meer streftes meerbring*", which translates as " Minister suggests that this movement must be broken and the police must maybe act a bit more drastically to bring about more deaths" (*Mail and Guardian*, 29.11.96:2).

9. At the inquest following Biko's death it emerged that two medical officers had failed to protect his rights. They were the Port Elizabeth district surgeon Ivor Lang and the chief district surgeon Benjamin Tucker. In 1980 the South African Medical and Dental Council refused to take action against the doctors. Before he died in the 1990s Ivor Lang expressed regret for his professional conduct (Tucker had already died by this time). Saira Essa and Charles Pillai's play *Steve Biko: The Inquest* (c. 1985) was based on the inquest hearing.

Five security police officers applied to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in September 1997 for amnesty for the Biko's death: Harold Snyman, Gideon Nieuwoudt, Daantjie Siebert, Rubin Marx and Johan Beneke. They laid most of the responsibility upon their superior at the time, Lieutenant-Colonel P.J. Goosen, who has been dead for some years.

10. Other poems that address the exploitation upon which South African cities have been built are Peter Horn's early poem "Morning in Durban" (1991:6) which was originally published in 1974, and Jeremy Cronin's "Faraway city, there..." (1983:70-1), which deals with Cape Town.

11. Mothobi Mutloatse's satirical "Bundu Bulldozers" (Van Wyk, Conradie and Constandaras, 1988:551-555) mocks the chiefs who served as government stooges.

12. By contrast James Matthews' poem, "We shall no longer intellectualise our plight" (1981:19), is dismissive:

> We shall no longer confuse ourselves with
> dialogue...
> We shall now be us
> Beware!

13. "They Do It" has resonances with Mafika Gwala's poem "Lobotomies of a party - May 1978" (1982:67-68), which also addresses liberal intellectuals' pretences at nonracialism. However, Gwala's speaker deals with the issue quite differently: he is rankled, stirred to retaliate and then departs in a flourish of pride.

14. The source is Serote's poem *Behold Mama Flowers!* (1978:75).

Chapter Six: Labour struggles and trade unions

6.1 Introduction

> The real artist in the world is human labor. It's human labor which has created the social environment out of the natural environment. All the modern technology and science and the arts are a product of human labor. When the product of that social human labor becomes the property of an idle few, can the artist be said to be free? ... The liberation of human labor is the only condition for the true liberation of the human being, the artist (Ngugi, 1983:67).

> The class struggle... is a fight for the crude and material things without which no refined and spiritual things could exist (Benjamin, 1970:256).

Marxists have argued that the motivation of apartheid was economic exploitation, with racial oppression playing a significant role in the formation of classes. Given the composition of South African society, and its history of colonialism and white minority domination, the working class has been largely black.

Workers in South Africa have been systematically oppressed. They have had starvation wages and harsh working and living conditions. Workers have risked imprisonment under the influx control and pass laws, and they have faced a range of dangers at the workplace. There are many poems which deal with the plight of South African workers, such as Bonisile Joshua Motaung's "At the Sugar Cane Fields" (Van Wyk, Conradie and Constandaras, 1988:613-614) and Oswald Mtshali's "The Washerwoman's Prayer" (1972:5) and "A Roadgang's Cry" (1972:13). In the ironic panegyric "City Johannesburg" (1972:12-13) Wally Serote challenges Johannesburg, from the point of view of a worker who struggles with labour, transport and work issues, and who is harassed by the restrictions on his movements. Serote's personification of the city suggests his desire to challenge the human origins of Johannesburg's exploitative treatment of its labour force. The following lines suggest that the wealth and power of the city is due to cheap labour, particularly in the mines:

> I can feel your roots, anchoring your might, my feebleness
> In my flesh, in my mind, in my blood,
> And everything about you says it,
> That, that is all you need of me.
> Jo'burg City, Johannesburg (1972:12-13)

The experience of working life finds voice in various workchants and songs, of which "*Shosholoza*" is the best known. Sipho Sepamla draws upon another popular chant in the

chorus of "The Work Song" (1976:50-51) to evoke the impetus for [illegible] against apartheid and capital:

> In Commissioner Street
> On the Main Reef Road
> In Prince's Avenue
> Down there where people are
> I've heard the anguish of a chant
> I've seen an army of tattered arms
> Swing sharply past the glint of the sun

At first the chant is alluded to in snatches:

> I've listened to the whisper: abelungu, abelungu
> Agony fading, cascading, to a humming: goddamn, goddamn (1976:50)

Eventually the chant is picked up in the chorus:

> wiping sweat goddamn
> sniffling mucus goddamn
> abelungu goddamn
> basibiza bojim
> basibiza bojim (1976:51)

Their singing is often all that a gang of workers has to sustain them through dull and exhausting manual work. Workers use chants to obviate the boredom induced by repetitious tasks or to keep time.

The correspondence between racial stratification and class in South Africa has been very high, and race has been a fairly reliable index of class. Although much has been made of the white working class, it is tiny in comparison to the black working class (disproportionately so, as a result of apartheid). Further, the income of the white working class under apartheid bore no comparison to the black working class, for instance white railway workers in the 1970s had wage packages that were better than those of qualified, "middle class" black teachers. This was besides the other benefits that accrued from racial privileges, such as job reservation, conditions of service, pensions, housing, medical facilities, and so on.

While the previous poems about the struggles of workers tend to focus on male workers, and while the Black Consciousness Movement treated the subject of the struggle as a generic black man, many workers were women. Few black women found work in the industries (where they received the lowest wages, and the least secure conditions of employment). Most women who sought work could only find jobs as domestic workers: "One in three African women workers in South Africa does a service job including domestic work" (Badsha and Wilson, 1986:151). Research by Behardien, Lehulere and Shaw suggests that in general domestic workers, together with women in agriculture,

> earn the lowest wages, work the longest hours, suffer bad living and working conditions and have little job security. Furthermore they have low status

> occupations and are in extremely vulnerable positions in relation to their employers (Badsha and Wilson, 1986:151).

It is the absence of alternatives that leave women most vulnerable to exploitation, as is demonstrated in Molahlehi wa Mmutle's poem "Our Immortal Mother" (Chapman and Dangor, 1982:167-8), which articulates the indignation of the child of an oppressed worker:

> My mother died as a servant
> She was buried as a meid
> A housemeid she was
> Like a *dienskneg* she lived [servant]
> With all humanity removed

Unable to do anything about her plight, her child is resentful:

> She ate out of a broken plate
> Drank from a cup without handle
> Those were oorskiets and krummels
> From her divine master's table (1982:167)

In the final stanzas the anger of the child is expressed in a critique that addresses the hypocrisy and the inhumanity of the employers and "their" God. Not only is the system of labour rejected, but the system of religion that naturalises the authority of the dominant group is also rejected:

> She had a Sunday off
> To pray and thank their God
> For their Godheid and genade
>
> They killed her
> She died in solitude
> Broken - broken to the bone
> Without raising an eye to heaven
> For the foreign God betrayed her (1982:167)

Chris van Wyk's poem "My Mother" (Frederikse, 1986:173) carries a similar kind of filial indignation. The child challenges the degrading ways in which woman servants have been addressed, rendering (and affirming) the colloquialisms that insult race (Coloured, African, Indian) and treat gender reductively ("meid", "girl" and "aunty"):

> My mother could never embrace me
> while she kept house for them
> held their children
>
> My mother is
> a boesman meid
> a kaffir girl
> a koelie aunty

> who wears beads of sweat around her neck
> and chains around her ankles

Unable to organise adequately, domestic workers have subsisted in alienation from their labour and from each other. Research done in the major metropolitan areas of the country suggests that

> the wages, in cash and kind, of full-time domestic workers fell in real terms (taking 1975 as the base year) by 16 per cent over the period 1973-80 (Wilson and Ramphele, 1989:60).

Most employers tend to believe that wages in kind are equivalent to cash. But the accommodation and meals that are given in part-payment are only for employees, who must still make provisions for their families, on a reduced wage. The provision of live-in accommodation that many employers find convenient is particularly damaging to the family lives of workers, for many black South African homes are headed by a woman. As Roseline Naapo, the poet, former domestic worker, and South African Domestic Workers' Union (SADWU) organiser has argued,

> Domestic work is not nice. You live in a room which they call a home. But you are not allowed to have visitors, you are not able to live with your husband. You are separated from your family for many months. Your employer expects you to smile every morning when you come into her house.
>
> When the employer leaves you with her kids, she expects you to be a good mother to her kids. You must be one hundred percent devoted to her kids. Meanwhile you feel a clot in your heart that you cannot even kiss your child in the morning when you wake up (Oliphant, 1991:22)

Little tolerance has been shown by most employers for the social needs of domestic workers. Instead they have found it convenient to blame the severity of their conditions of service on the influx control and pass laws. Some employers actively connived with the police in using legislation, such as the "key-law" (which operated in parts of Cape Town), to harass workers. This was done by supplying the police with duplicate keys to enter the rooms of workers at any time, making it impossible for workers to have children or partners with them (Badsha and Wilson, 1986:151).[1]

The inhumanity that sometimes characterises the treatment of domestic workers is addressed in Sankie Nkondo's poem "Worker Woman" (1990:121), which uses the image of bearing to render the gendered imperatives of labour:

> I am a worker woman
> bearing the burden of time
> I groom both man and beast
> with my hands on the thorn of time
>
> I am a worker woman
> bearing the world of mine

I carve hopes only to lose them

While Nkondo articulates two forms of oppression, the third is implied, in that most of the "worker women" in South Africa have been black. Subjected to a range of systems of oppression, their burden has been extreme. The National Household Survey found that the person responsible for the health of a household in South Africa is invariably a woman, to the extent of some 92% of the population (1995:12). Most women are poorly educated and earn very little, yet they have the sole responsibility of keeping a family together with few resources.

Miriam Tlali's "No Shelter for Cleaners" (Oosthuizen, 1987:164-9) and Nise Malange's "Nightshift Mother" (Evill and Kromberg, 1989:18-19) represent women who have no option but to work as night-shift cleaners, at great cost to their family lives and their safety. In Tlali's account, the office cleaner, referred to as Mrs T.H., tells of how the women finish work at 2H30 and battle to find somewhere to sleep because it is unsafe to travel home to the townships. In her working life Mrs T.H. has slept at Johannesburg Park Station until the police chased people away, then in the garage of the building where she worked, or she would "travel up and down, to and fro like that... until it was safe to get off at Nancefield and go home" (1987:167). Mrs T.H. relates that other passengers would caution her:

> "You'll get hurt in the trains here; going up and down alone, and a woman for that matter".... Then I would answer: "What can I do? I've got to try and save my life as I work. I have to work; I have no husband" (1987:167).

The ironic statement in the second stanza of Malange's poem conveys the anger and bitterness of workers who fully realise that they are exploited but have no alternative:

> Left with a double load at home
> my children left uncared
>
> Anxiety
> at work
> my boss insists we should
> be grateful for the opportunities
> he gives women to be exploited (1989:18)

Malange exposes the isolated and alienating nature of the work in images that challenge the reader with the injustice of the dispensation:

> And I work wandering on my knees
> through these deserted and desolate spaces
> the group of us lost in these vast buildings
> forgotten and neglected
> exploited as you sleep (1989:18).[2]

Service sector jobs generally pay a little more than domestic work, but the money is never adequate, as Mrs T.H. relates:

> We are holding on because.... What shall we do? We have children and grandchildren. We have to send them to school. How are we to feed them? There's not much we can do with that R34 [per fortnight]. We complain but it does not help.... The money only pays for the rent and for a few bags of coal. We just go on (1987:168).

Some workers tried to deal with the precariousness of their situation by coming together in collectives, which have generally taken the form of church groups (the best known of which are the Zionists), but there have also been skills and literacy classes (usually run by church or educational groups). The *Thula Baba* collective comprised a group of domestic workers involved in a literacy programme. The workers composed a poem "Domestic Workers" (1987:11), which addresses the challenges and problems they have faced:

> We are called girls. We are called maids.
> It is like we are small.
> It is like we are children.
>
> We are told what to do.
> We are told what to say.
> We are told what to think.
> We are told what to wear.
>
> We are women. We are mothers.
> Our bodies are strong from hard work.
> Our hearts are big from suffering.
>
> We struggle against hunger.
> We struggle against poverty.
> We struggle against sickness.
> We struggle against suffering.

The workers identify the isolated nature of their work and lives as an important challenge:

> Our problem is that we live alone.
> Our problem is that we work alone.
> Our problem is that we suffer alone.
>
> But we find friendship if we meet together.
> And we find answers if we talk together.
> And we find strength if we work together.
> And we find hope if we stand together.

While such efforts may be characterised as "provisional, rudimentary, hybrid forms where people were moved by events to represent themselves and their experience in the face of silence" (Brett, 1986:26), there is more to the poem than is immediately apparent. Given the nature of their working situation some domestic workers have learnt to count on their collective strength. The optimism and resolve that is expressed in the final stanza is based on an implicit recognition of the significance of solidarity. The (oral) technique of repetition is

harnessed to underscore their only source of power. Further, repetition imparts momentum to their words, supporting their solution-oriented approach. They use poetry as a resource, and the poem is treated as a struggle manual as they anticipate the power of organised worker structures.

Few employers tolerated the rights of workers to organise even when black trade unions were legalised. People in domestic service were particularly vulnerable (because of the isolated nature of their work), but even workers in the commercial and industrial sectors suffered dismissals because employers were suspicious that they were attempting to form unions. Two plays show this very clearly: in *Woza Albert!* (Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, 1983) the character Zuluboy is dismissed from Coronation Bricks, and in *Asinamali* (Ngema, 1985) Bongani Hlophe tells of how he was dismissed from the Savage and Lovemore company. Both companies are based in the Durban area, and they had poor records of industrial relations in the 1970s and early 1980s.

Poets such as Serote, Gwala, Cronin and Horn are not part of the working class and the inclusion of their work has to be explained. Owing to the political dispensation, the middle class among the oppressed has been very small in South Africa. Within this group there has been a small group of intellectuals, of whom a tiny number comprise writers, such as Serote. Owing to apartheid, most black writers have functioned in a largely working class social milieu, and many have come from working class families that continued to remain so even though that particular individual, through education (scholarships in some cases) and work, could be considered as middle class. The handful of black writers who came from families considered middle class in the 1960s or 1970s often made the class transition during the working lives of their parents. As there were virtually no alternatives, such families generally continued to live in working class townships, among their working class neighbours, friends and relatives. As a result, the term "middle class" does not accurately describe such a nebulous intermediate class, the members of which could just as easily move downwards as upwards in class terms, at the mercy of the vagaries of the apartheid state. The "class" was not large enough or powerful enough to reproduce itself. There was no established middle class milieu in the 1970s and 1980s, although the Botha government attempted to develop such a group, particularly in the homelands. But their numbers were tiny and they did not act as a class any more than they did as part of another group.

The term "middle class" often masked the huge discrepancy that existed between the black and the white middle classes, which Marxists and liberals tended to gloss over. Marxist discourse has tended to essentialise class to the exclusion of other variables. Mafika Gwala challenged this approach: "When whites talk of a 'middle class' there springs up the immediate question: middle class between what?" (1984:52). Gwala was justified, for the position of the Marxists was further weakened by the way in which they dealt with the racial categories that privileged themselves: they tended to respond defensively by dismissing various black writers of the 1970s as being petty bourgeois, without unpacking how that correlated with their own enormous class and race-bound privileges. Writers like Gwala and Serote were well aware of the contradictions that were obscured under the class rubric. While class analyses can be of immense value, the Marxists' applications of class to the South African context tend to have been weakened by their silences regarding their own subject-positions, and by their dependency on a theory that they failed to adapt to South African society. Class analyses were particularly valuable in catalysing the formation of working class

organisations, and in showing the hesitations and contradictions in the black intermediate classes' contributions to social change.[3]

The inclusion in this study of poets who are whites (and academics) may be justified by the fact that they have operated not just as *academic* Marxists, but have a depth and history of involvement in the worker movement and the liberation struggle, notwithstanding their racial classification by the state. This justification is similar to the inclusion of black poets of the intermediate class in an analysis of worker and working-class poetry. There is very little South African worker poetry in English that does not carry the influence of other classes.

6.2 Trade unionism

> you shall settle accounts with the oppressor
> You shall settle accounts with the exploiter
> (Qabula and Hlatshwayo, 1986:56)

> The working class has always been creative (Hlatshwayo, *Weekly Mail*, 17.7.87:28).

During the 1970s unions of black workers began to emerge from the repression. Some unions were the spontaneous products of shop floor activity, some were linked to the activism of radical white students who participated in Wages Commissions and worker benefit groups, while some had support from church or trade union organisations abroad. In 1972 the BC movement set about establishing a workers' council to serve the needs of black workers, to build solidarity and to create a sense of black development (Mothlabi, 1984:125). BAWU, the Black Allied Workers' Union, was established in the same year. However, the worker organisations tended to be divided and vulnerable, and under constant security police surveillance. The material conditions of capitalism, repressive legislation and security force action hindered the development of black working class organisations and consciousness. Nevertheless,

> [a]ll the unions were part of a ferment of popular struggle, evidence of the remarkable capacity of oppressed people to evolve ever new forms and instruments of struggle in the face of suppression (Mashinini, 1989:138).

The 1972-73 strikes which began in Durban and spread across Natal, the Transvaal and the eastern Cape signified the rebirth of black trade unionism after the silencing of the 1960s.

However, the unions' struggle for factory-level recognition met with few successes, and the frequency of strikes signalled growing political frustration. The government and capital were faced with worker militance, which challenged the cheap labour system. Given the close links between itself and local capital, the apartheid state was pressurised to undertake reform. Transnational capital (which had traded for a long time on the subordination of the black working class) was under pressure to disinvest, and was therefore moved to support superficial reform. As a result the government appointed the Wiehahn Commission of Inquiry. Acknowledging the right of African workers to form and belong to trade unions, the Wiehahn Commission (1979) recognised that the unions were growing rapidly and that to leave African workers outside the official system would weaken the state's chances of controlling them.

The non-racial Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) was formed in 1979, and by the end of 1981 it had 95 000 members. The Black Consciousness Council of Unions in South Africa (CUSA) was formed in 1980. By 1982 it had 130 000 members, of whom 100 000 members were from the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). Other trade union blocs were formed in the 1980s, culminating in the formation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in 1985 with 450 000 workers (NUM had joined in), while the smaller BC/Africanist National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) was formed in 1986. Ari Sitas conveys the momentum for worker representation in graphic images in "The Origins of Today's Tribulations" (1989b:36-45):

> A trickle of workers
> pock-marked with worry
>
> A downpour of issues
> Then the flood.
> Factory gates burst
> a trampling of humanity
> and poured it into tiny rooms
> then big church halls
> and then the stadiums
>
> Unions emerged
> on the back
> of a galloping grievance (1989:43-44)

The launch of the giant trade union federation COSATU in November 1985 inspired workers across the country to organise to improve their conditions of work:

> The federation was born into a state of emergency. It was a product not only of worker organisation, but also of a climate of uprising and even insurrection (Baskin, 1991:89).

COSATU's launch caused great panic among the opponents of black working class power: the state, most employers and reactionary black political organisations[4]. "The Tears of a Creator" by Alfred Temba Qabula and Mi Hlatshwayo (1986:49-56) was performed at the COSATU launch, at Kings' Park Stadium, Durban. The poem begins with an address to the

worker, one of the most exploited and neglected subjects of society, in terms that elites usually reserve for the divine:

> O' maker of all things

The analogy is as pertinent as it is ironic, and it is sustained in the questions that follow, which have Biblical overtones (of Christ's suffering):

> Your sin
> Can it be your power?
> Can it be your blood?
> Can it be your sweat? (1986:51)

The power of COSATU is celebrated through the comparison to the mythical tornado-snake *Inkhanyamba*, which, once liberated, is impervious to its enemies:

> Here it is:
> The tornado-snake of change! *Inkhanyamba*,
> The cataclysm
> Clammed for decades and decades
>
> By a mountain of rules.
> The tornado-snake
> Poisoned throughout the years
> By ethnicity
> And tribalism (1986:54)

COSATU is perceived as being part of the long struggle to establish trade unionism in South Africa:

> Where is the ICU of the 1920s to be found?
> Where is the FNETU of the 1930s to be found?
> Where is the CNETU of the 1940s to be found?
> And the others?
>
> They emerged
> They were poisoned
> Then
> They faded!
>
> COSATU
> Today be wise! (1986:55)

Qabula and Hlatshwayo perform the praise in isiZulu, and it has been published in isiZulu and English. COSATU has had a strong tradition of promoting communication through translation, whether in meetings, on the shop-floor or in its documents. The loss of time in meetings is made up in accessibility and increased participation, which is vital to the democratic character of the trade union federation.

COSATU and NACTU played a vital role in preparing their members for the struggles that were necessary to obtain optimum class leverage in the turbulent period that followed:

> The trade union movement as a key pillar of the broader working class is an important factor in the struggle for a complete transformation of our society. It has secured this position not merely through mass mobilization and protest action, but through building working class confidence, raising consciousness, developing grassroots leadership and mass education which form part of campaigns that fundamentally question the present organisation of society (Meintjies, 1989:25).

COSATU, with its huge membership and highly developed organizational bases, was well positioned to challenge the state, as Peter Horn suggests in "Canto Thirteen: There is a Writing on my Body" (1991:123-4):

> as a union together we will write our history
> on the body of the South African state.

6.3 The harassment and persecution of workers and unionists

Before the development of the independent trade union movement, the state's reaction to worker activists was as visceral as it had been towards its other black political opponents. Many workers, most of them unionists, died in detention: Masobiya Joseph Mdluli died while being detained in Durban in March 1976, and Neil Aggett, an organiser in the COSATU-linked Food and Canning Workers' Union, died after being tortured in detention in February 1982. The state claimed that Aggett had committed suicide, but this was unconvincing, and in an unprecedented show of solidarity a hundred thousand workers went on a thirty-minute work stoppage. Workers continued to die in detention, among them the trade union leader, Elija Loza, who died in 1987.

In May 1985 Andries Raditsela, a prominent leader from the time of FOSATU and was a senior shopsteward of the Chemical Workers' Industrial Union, died shortly after being released from detention under the Internal Security Act. Raditsela died of a head injury sustained when he fell out of a police Casspir at the time of his arrest some ten days earlier (Cooper, 1988:632). There were mass work stoppages and his funeral was attended by thousands of people. Nise Malange composed an elegy "This poem is dedicated to brother Andries Raditsela" (Qabula, Hlatshwayo and Malange, 1986:63), which begins with striking images that contradict the claim of the first line:

I have a few words to say - my mouth is a grave without flowers
It is like a river without water
But it has faith in your death.

If I had strength enough I would go and avenge your blood
Our blood

The middle section of the elegy issues a defiant challenge to the government:

Comrade, I did not come here to open a wound nor to mourn
I am here to challenge the minister of law and order
I am here to condemn death in detention (1983:63)

Malange nears her conclusion with a pledge reminiscent of the Mozambican poet Noemia da Sousa's "Poem for Joao" (Soyinka, 1975:197-199) which was written during a strike in the capital (Lourenco Marques, now Maputo) four decades earlier:

Your blood, Andries will not be in vain
Your blood will be a moral lesson for us to punish the oppressors,
Treason, detention and murders
Your blood will give power to your comrades,
To the workers, to your family and to us all (1983:63)

Despite pressure, harassment, and the possibility of dismissal or death, workers chose to continue with the process of unionisation, as Mlungisi Mkize (himself a victim of the war in Pietermaritzburg) argues in "echo sounds in maritzburg" (Ndaba, 1986:118-9):

the gun that walloped
graham hadebe
the gun has harnessed
my people together
the gun has fuelled the struggle (1986:118)

The polarisation of political interests (the UDF/ANC versus the IFP) led to the violence delineated in the following lines, which also show the impact of worker unity:

oppressors are now standing to lose
for i have
once more
seen union taking root-
at the stroke of death
once more there is
awareness, togetherness
solidarity, fraternity
take heed for
once more foes have turned to comrades (1986:118-9)

However, the crisis was escalating for the labour movement:

> For unions, the 1985/6 emergency was tame compared to the one declared on 12 June 1986. The second emergency was better planned, more harshly implemented, and gave virtually a free rein to the army and police. In contrast to the first emergency, it was applied to every region of the country (Baskin, 1991:134-5).

Within six weeks of the declaration of the June 1986 emergency 2 700 unionists were detained, of whom 81% were from COSATU. Some 320 elected trade union leaders and officials were detained. (The figures necessarily refer only to the detentions that were known.) Union offices were raided, members were intimidated, and the work of the unions was disrupted. It was difficult to run a mass union movement from hiding (Baskin, 1991:135). In addition to the ban on outdoor meetings, indoor meetings were also prohibited, making organising extremely difficult for workers. Some Eastern Cape factory workers were detained for up to three years. In Northern Natal virtually every COSATU organiser and most key shop stewards were detained. Unions struggled over job security for detainees, as well as for payment during detention. In Johannesburg 950 dairy workers were detained for two weeks for protesting the detention of two unionists. On their release they discovered that they had all been fired (Baskin, 1991:139). The trade union movement was subject to dirty tricks campaigns, including fake pamphlet campaigns. But the conditions of the second emergency failed to suppress the resistance:

> it became simply another hurdle to be overcome, another obstacle to organising the workers. For COSATU it reaffirmed the need to remain strong at the factory level, and not to centre unions around offices (Baskin, 1991:145).

Most employers were silent about the emergency clampdown, some supported it, and some, such as Premier Milling's Tony Bloom complained that "we are now faced with attempting to run our factories and enterprises by dealing with the mob because the leaders are in custody" (Baskin, 1991:137).

While some of the harassment of the state was directed at union and shopfloor leadership, the everyday harassment of ordinary workers was unremitting, as the expression of resistance through song demonstrates. People have always sung on South African trains, although in the past the songs were mainly of a religious nature. By the mid-1980s the resistance meetings held on trains were supplemented with dances and songs. A sacked worker made a play to show on trains, pointing out, "If we entertain people, they are more likely to support our struggle" (Slovo in Corrigall, 1990:60). There was also a train play called *Workers Lament*. A play performed by women passengers was called *Women stand up for your rights*. The police responded by raiding the trains daily and in three months in 1989 some 460 people were arrested for disturbing the peace on trains (1990:61). In August 1989, when 47 workers (most of them members of COSATU) were charged with disturbing the peace by singing on the trains, some 500 workers took the Johannesburg-to- Kempton Park train to attend the trial. On the way they sang and chanted freedom songs and praises of their unions, the ANC, SWAPO, the Sandinistas and their own strength. When the workers arrived at Kempton Park they were dispersed with sjamboks by the police. Some 15 workers were injured. More police

harassment was experienced on the road to the court. It seemed that the security forces were determined to stop the singing of political songs. However, the workers were not to be quelled. Eventually the "singing trial" of the original accused was postponed indefinitely (*Weekly Mail*, 11.9.89:2-3).

6.4 Mining

> ... we begin to understand that the truly heroic *is* the ordinary, the everyday of the South African working class (Cronin, 1987:19).

The focus of several writers on mining clarifies the nature of the exploitation that occurred in one of the largest and most profitable sectors in the economy in the 1970s and the early 1980s. Mtutuzeli Matshoba's story "To Kill a Man's Pride" (Mutloatse, 1980:103-127) addresses the problems of migrant workers in Johannesburg. The play *Egoli*, by Matsemela Manaka (no date[5]), which was banned in 1979, portrayed the troubled lives of two miners. Alfred Temba Qabula addresses the exploitation many migrant labourers experience in the ironically-titled poem "The Small Gateway to Heaven" (1989a:49-51). The poem is based on his own bitter experience of leaving the impoverished eastern Cape for a compound (the "small gateway") in Carletonville ("heaven"), which he alternately describes as the "place of gold, dagga, drink and oppression":

> When the recruiters invaded our homes
> To get us to work the mines,
> They would say:
> "... Come to the place of the
> Hairy-jaw
> Where starvation is not known."
>
> And we joined the queues through the small gate to Heaven
> And we found the walls of our custody,
> And degradation,
> And of work, darkness to darkness,
> With heavy shoes burdening our feet with worry,
> For nothing,
> At the place of the Hairy-jaw,
> Away from our loved ones.
>
> I have seen this prison of a Heaven,
> This kraal which encircles the slaves
>
> I saw it as the heart of our oppression,
> I saw the walls that separate us
> from a life of love (1989a:51).

Qabula's juxtaposition of hope and cynicism, desolate homesteads and makeshift mass accommodation, the oral tradition and an urban idiom, offers a poignant expression of the experience of millions of workers against a formidable system:

> Popular art can be seen as a new kind of art created by a new emergent class, the fluid heterogenous urban mass.... The syncretism of their art, drawing as it did on both indigenous (hinterland) and imported (metropolitan) elements was

> therefore an expression and a negotiation of their real social position at the point of articulation of two worlds (Barber, 1987:14).

Discrimination has been rife on the mines. While the gold mines were very profitable the wages of black miners remained poor and inequitable, as various analysts have indicated:

> In early 1987 the lowest monthly wages, according to NUM [the National Union of Mineworkers], were R200,00 on gold mines, and R194,00 on coal mines. While most miners earned more, their wages were still low: in 1986 the average black mineworker earned a mere R427,00 per month. During that year mine industry profits reached a new record of R8,3-million (Baskin, 1991:226).

Ben Magubane points out that black gold miners earned an average of R5 127 per annum, while white miners earned an average of R27 679 (Turok, 1990:142). Goodman Ntsasa of the NUM offices in Carletonville wrote the poem "What have you done to us?" (1988:9) which challenges the lack of transparency on the part of the mine managements:

> They give you pay with a lot
> of deductions
> But they don't give you full
> details about them.
> They don't show deductions of food
> and rent in your payslips.

However, the discrepancy in the earnings of the black labour force is only part of the picture. In the mid-1980s whites got 35 days paid leave while blacks were given only 14 days. There were safety incentive bonuses for whites but not for blacks, yet it was the white staff who had responsibility for the production quotas of the blacks under them (Turok, 1990:142-3). This meant that such staff were rewarded for placing productivity above the safety of the black staff. Discrimination also extended to racially segregated lift cages and inferior canteens (*Weekly Mail*, 29.9.89:10-11).

Mining, and deep-level mining in particular, is a very dangerous activity, as Cyril Ramaphosa pointed out: "Between 1973 and 1984, more than 8 500 miners were killed on the mines" (Baskin, 1991:149). In 1985 alone, "over 500 men were killed (a fatality rate of one per one thousand people employed) and 13 000 were disabled for at least 14 days by accidents in the gold mines" (Wilson and Ramphele, 1989:80). The overwhelming majority of the casualties were black miners.

In addition to the high number of fatalities, the lives of hundreds of thousands of miners were ruined by accidents or by occupational illnesses. Compensation for disability or death has been inadequate. A NUM study concluded that

> a mineworker who spends 20 years working underground risks one chance in 30 of being killed and a 50% chance of being permanently disabled. Since 1900 over 68 000 miners have died in mining accidents, while a further one million workers have been permanently disabled (Baskin, 1991:152).

As COSATU contended, "Black miners were paying with their lives for a profit they did not share" (1991:149).

In the context of such data stand the last two lines of the first stanza of Jeremy Cronin's poem "To learn how to speak" (1983:58):

> The low chant of the mine gang's
> Mineral glow of our people's unbreakable resolve

Cronin's poem celebrates the real wealth of the country: the people, whose will to be liberated has been more durable than the prized mineral. Unionisation offered the only hope of relief for the mineworkers. In the 1980s the National Union of Mineworkers was the fastest growing union in the world, with a paid up membership of more than 260 000 mineworkers (Baskin, 1991:224). The size and the strength of the National Union of Mineworkers attested to the capacity of migrant workers to unite despite the conditions that worked to divide them and to prevent the development of a homogeneous working class culture: a large proportion of workers were employed on contracts (even though many stayed for their working lives), while the hostels for migrant labour were segregated on the basis of "ethnicity".

Millions of women's lives were connected to the conditions on the mines. In an untitled poem, Boitumelo[6] (1979:60) writes of the grim toll of industrial accidents, from the point of view of a rural woman:

> Here I stand
> With no child in sight
> Did I conceive to throw away?
>
> My children have gone to the towns
> To seek bread
> They never returned
> They went to the mines
> To dig gold
> They died in Shaft 14...
> My children
> Children of blood, blood of my children.

A similar sense of catastrophe and powerlessness is depicted in Manaka's play *Egoli* (no date:25), where the character John learns that his young son Oupa, whom he thought was still living at home on the farm, has died in the mining accident that he himself was lucky to survive.

The worst mining disaster in this period occurred at the Kinross mines in September 1986 when 180 miners died. The disaster highlighted the dangers of secretive, management-controlled safety procedures. It also indicated the necessity for a strong union movement to act as a check. The full extent of the Kinross disaster was uncovered only because NUM, which had been established under the slogan "organise or die", had challenged the mineowners on safety issues and racist procedures (*Weekly Mail*, 29.9.89:10-11). As Qabula

and Hlatshwayo declared in "The Tears of a Creator" (1986:49-56), which they had performed at the COSATU launch a few months earlier:

> We
> Have dared to fight back
> Even from the bottom of the earth
> Where we pull wagons-full of gold
> through our blood (1986:52).

6.5 May Day

The struggle over May Day is an index of the power struggles that have occurred between organised labour and the state. The government first demonised the demands of workers for the recognition of the day, and then struggled over conceding it in the face of unremitting pressure from organised labour.

Initially commemorated in 1896, the first day of May has long been recognised in many countries as International Labour Day. May Day was first observed in South Africa in 1904. Since 1926 workers have battled to have the day officially recognised. By 1961 May Day was excluded by law as a paid holiday from all industrial council agreements. Attempts in the 1980s to revive the day met with severe state repression (Baskin, 1991:120). In 1985, workers involved in cultural groups were determined to use May Day to demonstrate their solidarity, and for three months they made time after work and on weekends to have rehearsals at their union offices (Von Kotze, 1988:61).

COSATU tried to transcend the boundaries drawn by the state and business in their conceptualisation of May Day, as is evident in the poem that the trade union cultural activist Nise Malange read at the 1985 May Day function at Curries Fountain, "I, the unemployed" (Qabula, Hlatshwayo and Malange, 1986:59-60):

> I'm here
> Living under a Black cloud
> Here, living in thinning light
> Here
> Freedom is nailed to a tree
> To die.
> Here I am living: in a matchbox
>
> I am here dying of hunger
> And my country is also dying

> My children are dying too
> Look at them

The identification with the unemployed shows the larger social interest of the trade union movement represented by COSATU. The federation saw itself not only as a representative of workers, but took into account the welfare of those unable to secure work in an economy that was slowing down (as a result of the political pressure on the state). The fact that unemployment has affected more than half of the African population (NHS, 1995:50) clarifies COSATU's concern. Malange's second stanza, in particular, represents the expanded consciousness of organised workers, implicitly challenging the narrow self-interest of the state and its business allies.

By 1986 the conservative liberal press acknowledged that the unions had won the right to May Day: "If there was ever any doubt about workers' May Day wishes, it was removed yesterday", noted *The Star*, arguing that: "An undeclared holiday is disruptive, bedevils industrial relations, creates anomalies, undermines the authority of law, makes a mockery of statutory holidays" (Baskin, 1991:126). Even the more conservative *Sunday Times* recognised that

> South Africa's black workers have for all times unilaterally declared May 1 a public holiday. Government acceptance of this week's holiday by public fiat would not only be wise but gracious (1991:126).

Many employers grudgingly conceded the development.

In May 1986 Premier Foods was the first major employer to recognise both May 1 and June 16 as paid holidays for all employees. Recognising that the government had lost the initiative, many companies followed:

> The government was unwilling to concede to COSATU's demands, which it had labelled both communist and subversive. Having labelled 1 May a communist day with Marxist links, it had painted itself into a corner (Baskin, 1991:127).

Most large employers had a more sophisticated approach than the government: realising that it was not possible to destroy the union movement, they sought to curb the power of the unions. But the government's intransigence was consistent with its programme of repression. Having focused on curbing the power of the "young comrades" in the emergency declared in June 1986, the security establishment seemed to have decided that it was time to act on the union movement:

> In 1987 the state declared that the first Friday of every May would be known in future as Workers' Day. The unions rejected this and stuck to their 1 May demand. However, conflict was avoided during 1987 since 1 May happened to coincide with the first Friday in May that year (Baskin, 1991:127).

However, COSATU's Living Wage Campaign, due to be launched on May Day 1987, was declared a communist plot by the state, and the rallies around it were banned. Nevertheless,

the May Day rallies went ahead, to the reading of much poetry and the performance of songs and music. The academic and activist Peter Horn's "Canto Seven: One and Many" (1991:113-4) was performed on 1 May 1987 at Athlone Stadium in Cape Town:

> You were all alone until you understood
> that you were not alone. Until you looked and saw:
> There are others alone like me, but together
> we can lick them. Because we are many.
> Because we are many, and we, many, are one,
> we can win this war for freedom
> we can win this war for a human existence.
> Because we are many more than them,
> we can win this war for food and housing
> and comfort and knowledge and power (1991:114)

Celebrating the meaning of solidarity, Horn delineates the material significance of the unity that COSATU workers sought to develop with other workers across the country and the world:

> alone we are helpless and victims of power,
> together we win the war and we win our life:
> together means union, united in struggle,
> together means workers united to win (1991:114)

The political situation was tense because of the election scheduled for 6 May 1987, when the white electorate was polled for its support on two issues: the government's reform moves, and security force action to crush "communist subversion". COSATU, with other sections of the democratic movement (principally the United Democratic Front and the National Education Crisis Committee), supported the call for a two-day stayaway on 5 and 6 May. Almost 1,5 million workers and 1 million students responded. In regions such as the Eastern Cape almost 100% absenteeism was recorded (Baskin, 1991:190).

On 7 May 1987 two explosions, clearly the work of professional saboteurs, destroyed COSATU house. Two weeks before, in the midst of intensified government attacks on the union movement, police had warned COSATU members during a raid of the premises "that the building would either be burnt or bombed 'to the ground'" (Baskin, 1991:191). COSATU and five unions lost their head offices. The regional, branch and local offices of many affiliated unions were also destroyed. Besides accommodating the offices of the federation and several unions, COSATU House had also been used to coordinate the broader labour movement and the mass democratic movement. Some news reports implied that COSATU itself had been responsible for the bombings. During this period there were many attacks on union offices throughout the country. COSATU launched a "Hands Off COSATU" campaign.

In 1988, May 1 fell on a Sunday. Organised workers decided that in addition to observing the day, they would also take off the first Friday, 6 May: "What the government had sown, it should reap, they argued" (Baskin, 1991:127). The government, though out-manoeuvred, remained intransigent and declared that in future Workers' Day would be observed on the first

Monday in May. Conveniently, this coincided with 1 May 1989, as Baskin commented ironically (1991:127). Peter Horn's "Canto Fifteen: We demand a living wage!" (1991:126-128) which was performed on May Day at Athlone Stadium picked up on the Living Wage Campaign that the government had atempted to crush in 1987. This was a more strident call than the one that he made in the May Day poem two years previously:

> Comrades,
> the cost of living has made a hole in our pockets
> and the wealth of the country is not there!
> The rent goes up, and the landlord thrives,
> and the pay packet shrinks (1991:126)

Demonstrating a sense of solidarity that goes beyond the divisions of class and race, the poet challenged the position of the authorities:

> When we want to live,
> I mean just to live,
> they tell us
> that living is seditious
> that living is revolutionary
> that living is treason to the state
> that living is bad for business
>
> But we say: (Let me hear you!)
> *We demand a living wage!* (1991:126-7)

David Webster, an academic and a human rights activist with strong links to the labour movement, was killed on the morning of 1 May 1989, the first (though qualified) recognition of May Day as a public day of commemoration by the government. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1997) has heard evidence that Webster's killers were part of a death squad of the security forces.

Only in 1990, after the declarations of February 2, did the government finally accept that May would be observed as Workers' Day: "It had taken four years to acknowledge what the majority of the people had proclaimed in 1986" (Baskin, 1991:127). The battle for the recognition of a day that is observed internationally characterises the struggle for power in South Africa: enormous effort was required to secure surprisingly simple rights.

6.6 The MAWU strike and *The Long March*

Since the 1950s workers at the British multinational in Howick, B.T.R. Sarmcol have struggled to gain union recognition. In April 1985, some 870 workers affiliated to the Metal

and Allied Worker's Union (MAWU) at B.T.R. Sarmcol went on a legal strike over their demands. Two days later the entire workforce was fired. Most workers had an average of 18 to 25 years of service with the company. Scab labour was hired with the help of government labour bureaus. MAWU instituted court proceedings on the grounds of unfair labour practices and began solidarity campaigns. Developments arising out of the MAWU strike are of significance because they show that "cultural activism established itself as an organised consolidated form of struggle alongside labour organisation and a strong worker leadership" (Von Kotze, 1988:18).

Owing to overt government and other ruling class controls, engaging with the social order has never been easy for workers. Working-class people, whose lives are dictated by the inimical interests of capital and by various social agencies (eg., the media), rarely see their interests fairly represented in the public arena. After six months of being on strike, the B.T.R. Sarmcol workers established co-operatives to sustain unity, to provide some income, and to establish participatory methods in production and distribution which the strikers hoped to see introduced at B.T.R. Sarmcol. One of the co-operatives was the Sarmcol Workers' Co-operative (SAWCO). Through the process of a week-long workshop, a group of workers with no experience of acting developed the play *The Long March*, with assistance from the Durban Workers' Cultural Local and the Culture and Working Life Project at the University of Natal. As with its bulk-buying and silk-screening co-operatives, SAWCO made a deliberate effort to engage in democratic production practices.

MAWU workers "organised themselves around cultural activity because they realised that united action does not just mean political struggle and the fight for union issues" (Von Kotze, 1988:14). The plays that they workshopped helped them explore collective ways of reflecting on their experiences and articulating their vision for the future (Meintjies, 1989:25). Besides enabling workers to think through their challenges, play-making helped them test their concepts with other workers who shared their experiences and frustrations; to establish relations of solidarity across unions, regions, ethnicity and even race; and to explore options and challenge imposed points of view. Organised worker culture has served to counter the helplessness, isolation and alienation that industrial work in particular generates. It allows workers in the audience to learn about the experiences of fellow workers and recognise the bases for solidarity and unity. It also enables exposure to the experiences of workers who have gone before, as well as access to the history of working class struggles, from the point of view of working class people. As Von Kotze explains, the plays give workers the chance to do what is too dangerous to express at work: disagreement, anger, frustration, rejection, or even contempt for managers (1988:12). Although worker plays often show the exploitation and abuse of workers, they do not show workers being defeated or crushed: "The notion of a depressed 'down-trodden' workforce is as unacceptable to the makers of plays as it would be to the audience" (1988:13).

The Long March traced the history of the workers, many of whom experienced forced removals twice before being settled in Mpophomeni (where 40% of the strikers lived). Typical of worker plays, *The Long March* was interspersed with many songs that clarified the main messages, such as "Sophinda siteleke" (We shall strike again), and the poem "It's a long, long march to freedom." Everyday language was used. The play addressed the exploitation at work (through parodying assembly-line mass production), and the long struggle for union recognition that resulted in the strike. Through the creation of characters such as "Maggie

Thatcher" (by means of a vivid mask donned by one of the male actors), the play exposed the collusion between neo-imperialism and capitalism in South Africa. It also addressed the resulting poverty and the police attacks that the Mpophomeni community endured, as well as their attempts to defend themselves.

The play was first performed in November 1985, for the Mpophomeni community, the shopstewards and other unionists. In 1986, under the state of emergency, it played to workers across the country. The aims of the tour, according to a worker (identified as "Peter, the spokesperson for the players"), were:

> to spread our struggle right through the country so everybody should know what is really happening about the Sarmcol strikers. To inform the people was our major objective. Fundraising was meant to provide the families of strikers with food parcels (Von Kotze, 1988:80-1).

Besides union newspapers and meetings, workers have not had the means to express themselves publicly over issues that affect them deeply. By touring, the Mpophomeni workers were able to share their struggles with workers across the country.

In December 1986 armed Inkatha Freedom Party vigilantes and people dressed in the uniforms of KwaZulu police tortured, murdered and then burnt the bodies of two MAWU shopstewards and the daughter of a striker. A day later Mpophomeni township was attacked, a youth was killed and others were injured. SAWCO decided to dedicate the play to the deceased, who were the township leader and head of the MAWU shop stewards, Phineas Sibiya; the actor and the play's main motivator Simon Ngubane; the SAWCO activist Flomin Mnikathi; and the youth activist Alpheus Nkabinde. The killings were characteristic of the struggle in Natal, where a sustained campaign of assassinations against COSATU and the UDF was being waged. The workers responded by strengthening their unity and productivity. In this *The Long March* was like the earlier *Clover Worker's Play,* which showed the capacity of drama to articulate the feelings of workers under attack, and to mobilise collective power. Later, *The Long March* players were invited, in an expression of international worker solidarity, to play in Britain, so that the unfair labour practices of a British multinational in the "third world" would be exposed.

At COSATU's second national congress in July 1987, a resolution to the effect that "culture cannot be left in the hands of the enemy" (Von Kotze, 1988:18) resonated with the struggles around the country and particularly in KwaZulu-Natal. Across the country community and worker structures have been involved in making and performing plays about their living conditions and struggles, with the understanding, as Hlatshwayo explained that the plays "have the potential of popularising our worker politics" (*Weekly Mail*, 17.7.87:28). Drawing on the oral history of the Mpophomeni area, SAWCO developed the play *Bambatha's Children*, which used sophisticated dramatic devices, powerful mime and songs to recount the hidden history of three generations of dispossession:[7]

> *Bambatha's Children* breaks new ground in workers' theatre. It not only focuses on a single union issue or struggle but it also attempts to contextualise current repression historically.... Plays like these, drawing on the popular

> memory of resistance heroes of the past, help to shape and articulate popular resistance in the 1980s (Purkey, *Weekly Mail*, 2.10.89:33).

In September 1987 the courts found in favour of BTR Sarmcol. The judgement suggested that "[c]ollective democracy of the kind practised by unions should not be tolerated in South Africa" (*Weekly Mail*, 18.9.87:8-9). However, on appeal, the Natal Supreme Court ruled, in March 1989, that the Industrial Court had acted incorrectly. The union continued to seek negotiation with the management to resolve the matter.[8]

A few months before these judgements the successor to MAWU, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) was launched. A powerful union with strong socialist-leanings, NUMSA was created through a process of unity among unions who managed to overcome deep historical divisions. When NUMSA, the second largest COSATU affiliate, was launched in May 1987 Moses Mayekiso was elected as the general secretary. This was an expression of solidarity and defiance, for Mayekiso and other Alexandra Action Committee activists were detained for a long time before being charged with treason, for attempting to improve the Johannesburg slum in which they lived. It would be two years before Mayekiso was acquitted of treason and could take up his post. Alfred Temba Qabula, who had been a member of MAWU/NUMSA, composed the praise poem "Jangeliswe: For Moss Jangeliswe Mayekiso" (1989b:135-6):

> Jangeliswe -
> live up to your Israelite name
> and lead

Qabula's poem celebrates Mayekiso's long record of struggle, both in the trade union movement and in Alexandra township, in terms that express reverence for Mayekiso's sacrifices and his ability to teach by example, despite the onslaught of the security forces:

> Like Mandela
> you pushed around the seat of their kingdom
> and now you are thrown in kwanongqonqo [prison]
> the sealed box of endless nights
> trying to stop you in what you were up to
> trying to erase you from popular memory
> they put forward sellouts and they prize people to praise them
> but you resurface and they shout that "it is getting hot at Alex
> we can't stand all this pressure"
> then they charge you
> to put you away forever
> but you look them in the face
> and you speak out the truth
> about how the people are crushed and exploited
> and how they light fires to help see through the darkness
> and how to choose stones to erect new bridges
> to pass over the floods
> and how to trail through the thornfields
> how to care for each other on the road

with such heavy burdens
with your own life neglected
your own homesteads in tatters
you move on and speak the truth

6.7 SARHWU workers and *Township Fever*

Mbongeni Ngema's play *Township Fever* (1989)[9], which dealt with the 1987 strike by the South African Railways and Harbour Workers' Union (SARHWU), unwittingly showed the need for the involvement of workers in representations of their struggle.

During the troubled SARHWU strike involving 20 000 railway workers, three workers were shot dead and many were injured by police on 22 April 1987. Police then occupied COSATU headquarters for five hours, holding workers at gunpoint, spreadeagled and facing the wall.[10] A few days later some strikers killed four scab workers and burnt their bodies using the "necklace" method.[11] When the bodies were discovered a day after the killings, the police, claiming to be looking for the killers, laid seige to COSATU house again, and videotaped thousands of workers whom they led out at gunpoint past masked police informants: "11 were arrested, including a 12-year old child" (Baskin, 1991:179). Eventually eighteen people were tried for the murders, eight were found guilty and four were sentenced to death. COSATU and SARHWU condemned the killings, but they denied responsibility for them, stating that the first that they had heard of the murders was after the raid on COSATU House (1991:179).

The local reception of *Township Fever* was in stark contrast to the reception of *Woza Albert!* (1983) and *Asinamali* (1985). Ngema's earlier work had demonstrated a thorough grasp of the social and political problems of oppressed South Africans. Ngema defended himself against the outcry by explaining that he had been overseas touring with *Sarafina!* when he heard from his lawyer about the SARHWU strike. On his return, he visited the workers who were on death row for the murder of the strike-breakers, disguised as a legal interpreter. Ngema argues that he based *Township Fever* on the stories of the strike breakers, the court reports and the attorney's reports (1995:viii).

Workers, unionists and others who were involved in or familiar with the SARHWU strike were in an uproar over the play. The workers believed themselves to have been oppressed thrice, twice by the state as an employer and as a repressive force, and then by the playwright who misrepresented their struggle. As the playwright and director, Ngema was accused of treating the industrial action as a curiosity, evidently because he was more interested in appealing to foreign (possibly United States') audiences, whose remoteness from the context explained his liberties with complex issues. Ngema was criticized for behaving like the stereotype of an arrogant and misinformed visitor, who was merely interested in framing the quaint locals to fit a reductionist and self-serving theatrical model. It was also charged that he

sacrificed the facts of the strike to create an impressive musical and choreographic spectacle, eg., most of the songs had little to do with the subject. There is little explanation in the play of the connection between the actions of management and the police, and the attacks made by a few workers on the scab labour.

Some of Ngema's critics argued that he demonstrated a lack of comprehension of the complex forces that had shaped the violence, and of the connection between workers' daily experiences and apartheid. In the play there is the suggestion that the workers became militant because they were drugged by a "sangoma" (a traditional healer), an inaccurate and sensationalist misrepresentation of the conditions of labour that gave rise to the national strike. Further, Ngema's critique of the actions of a small group of SARHWU workers failed to contextualise the role of the labour movement in uniting and mobilising severely oppressed workers to challenge the combined might of the state and capitalist systems of oppression (*The Weekly Mail*, 30.3.90; *New Nation*, 20.4.90).

COSATU's Living Wage Group claimed that Ngema had misquoted and misrepresented SARHWU and COSATU in the play. The issue of responsible representation was elaborated by Carol Steinberg:

> Ngema made a play that purports to represent real historical events. Clearly he has a responsibility to depict those events as accurately as possible. That responsibility deepens when there is so much at stake in the way the events are interpreted. In this case four people's lives are in the balance: the SARHWU members sitting on death row (1990:73).

The problem of representation grew more complicated as certain newspapers reported that the COSATU Living Wage Group had attempted to censor the play, which the union denied. Of related concern was the issue that, since the state had placed severe restrictions on the media (under the various states of emergency), South African plays had represented resistance struggles abroad. Therefore inaccurate and damaging dramatic representations were particularly harmful.

The play and its personalities offered unintentionally incisive insights into the shortcomings of populist literature, particularly in the playwright's manipulation of topical industrial-political themes to give his play token credibility at the expense of workers' movement. Bheki Mqadi, who played the most controversial character in *Township Fever* (which he has described as "a tragic comedy"), unwittingly summed up the contradictions in an interview:

> I see nothing wrong in the way the play is done. Sometimes people do not understand stage plays... If you get on to the stage as simply as you are - in real life - you will not be interesting to the people watching the play (*Weekly Mail*, 18.5.90:23).

It is the liberties that are taken with the construct of "the people" that are enlightening, and in stark contrast to the labour movement's struggle to affirm the rights of one of the largest and most exploited sectors of society.

Long before the *Township Fever* debacle Mi Hlatshwayo, the national culture co-ordinator of COSATU, recognised that "[c]reativity without a base, without direction, without the support of a democratic movement, is easily manoeuvred into commercial art" (*Weekly Mail*, 17.7.87:28). In another remark, which could well apply to the challenges and contradictions facing individual dramatists like the talented Ngema, Hlatshwayo pointed out that,

> It takes a lot for an artist to deprive himself of money and glory and stick to principles, to say I am not selling my principles, my nation, my class. This is people's culture (1987:28).

6.8 Focus on cultural production

> The people are the real producer of culture, just as they are the real producer of material wealth (Machel in Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983:25).

> We have been culturally exploited time and time again: we have been singing, parading, boxing, acting and writing within a system we did not control. So far, black workers have been feeding all their creativity into a culture machine to make profits for others.... from penny-whistle bands to *mbaqanga* musicians, from soccer players to talented actors... they are taken from us, from their communities, to be chewed up in the machine's teeth. Then... they are spat out - an empty husk, hoboes for us to nurse them. This makes us say it is time to begin controlling our own creativity (The Durban Workers' Cultural Local, *Weekly Mail*, 17.7.87:28).

The *Dunlop Play* was created in 1983 to add to the pressure upon the Dunlop tyre company to recognise the Metal and Allied Workers' Union (MAWU). More than that the *Dunlop Play* examined the history of the Dunlop tyre company from the point of view of the workers: some of the players had been working at Dunlop for 25 years (Von Kotze, 1988:29):

> Through culture, the working class affirms its identity and its interests, and rediscovers its history; it also unravels, in a dynamic and life-giving way, the hidden patterns and structures which underpin subjugation of the working class (Meintjies, 1989:24).

Worker organisations recognised the significance of cultural production to enable workers to begin to control their creative powers. As a result COSATU created institutions to reinforce working class culture by focusing on cultural production. Through organising and cultural production workers actively and consciously developed and articulated their identity as a class. They clarified their identity in relation to other groups, and developed the content and form of worker culture. This is evident in the cultural content of their production, from posters and graphics to banners, songs, poetry, plays and T-shirts (such as those produced by the unemployed workers' cooperative, *Zenzeleni*, in Durban).

The *Dunlop Play* created space for cultural activity within the labour movement and led to the formation of the Durban Workers' Cultural Local, which was initiated in 1984 and established in 1985 (Von Kotze, 1988:54). Following recognition within COSATU that the struggle for cultural transformation was central to the liberation struggle, there was a surge of cultural activity in the labour movement. COSATU established cultural locals, which paralleled shop stewards' structures, in Durban, Howick and Pinetown. COSATU also established a culture office and created the post of national culture co-ordinator. Workers were able to acquire extensive training at the Culture and Working Life Project in Durban and the Community Arts Project in Cape Town. These initiatives demonstrate the seriousness with which the worker federation attended to the cultural development of workers even as it fought for its existence under the various states of emergency.

Since most strikes involve dismissals, most worker plays deal with dismissals. *The Clover Play* has its origins in the dismissal under the state of emergency (in July 1986) of 168 Food and Allied Workers' Union (FAWU) members at Clover Dairies. They had been striking against an alleged conspiracy between management and the Inkatha-aligned United Workers Union of South Africa. The process by which the play was created is explained by Mi Hlatshwayo:

> This is the story of things that really happened to these workers. As such one person couldn't really sit down and write it. Shop stewards suggested an outline for the play and the worker-actors then workshopped each scene, in no particular order, for four weeks. We didn't put people into parts, but tried each scene with different actors, until someone got it right. The scenes were then woven together into a whole which, however, keeps getting unpicked. Workers from Clover branches and other factories would tell us to put other things in (Chapman, 1988:28).

The workshop method is an established characteristic of South African resistance drama (Fleischman, 1990). In a country based on hierarchical structures of exclusion the co-operative method of production represented an ideological move towards a society based on the social process of democratic communality, although there were many contradictions in practice (Gready, 1994:179-183). Working class theatre is not merely an event but a process that involved a huge range of participants. Chapman points out that the worker play has a communicative function for fellow workers that is real rather than merely symbolic (1988:28). But it also had a developmental function for the strikers and for other workers facing similar conditions. That the *The Clover Play* was effective may be gauged from the strong community support that was generated, which included a boycott of Clover products.

In October 1987, after a long court hearing the Clover management agreed to pay the dismissed workers R200 000 in severance pay and to drop the charges against FAWU.

Worker literature has been an integral part of organised labour's discourse of resistance:

> through organisations the labour movement is forging a language of resistance that powerfully contests the language of domination and articulates the deepest aspirations of the people (Meintjies, 1989:25-26).

This is not a straightforward process. Many workers were turned into artists by the pressure of events. Recognising that consciousness is not fixed (and that the consciousness of the most oppressed class is vulnerable to manipulation by various interest groups), the trade unions invested in cultural production as a means of consolidating worker consciousness. Hlatshwayo remarks on worker enthusiasm for dramatic performances:

> No union gathering passes without poetry recitals, chanting and singing. There is no way we can begin to articulate the richness of worker poetry which sometimes erupts spontaneously during union gatherings (Oliphant, 1991:7).

Meintjies and Hlatshwayo argue that given the conditions of its production, worker culture represents a greater investment of commitment than the cultural production of any other class:

> Workers face the most crippling effects of economic exploitation: long work hours, long travel distances, low wages, poverty, and a serious lack of cultural resources in the bleak townships, settlements, compounds and hostels. These conditions make every cultural work an act of sacrifice as much as an act of creation and imagination (1989:5).

This is supported by the statement that the Durban FOSATU Local Cultural Group made about their work:

> we are involved in this, however hard it is for us after work, because we believe that our struggle is not only there to destroy the oppressive powers that control us. It is there to also build a new world. To do this, we must begin now (Durban FOSATU Local Cultural Group, 1985:72).

Roseline Naapo, the writer and South African Domestic Workers' Union organiser, clarifies the meaning of such a commitment in her contention that encouraging domestic workers to tell their stories is an integral part of the work of a labour organiser:

> I encourage other domestic workers to write short stories... to be a writer does not mean you have to go to school. You can say whatever you want to say without knowing how to write. The next person can write it for you. I regard it as my duty to assist other domestic workers.... [a]s an organiser for the South African Domestic Workers' Union (Oliphant, 1991:22).

Naapo's statement supports Nise Malange's position that "each person has a story to tell... you do not need to be well-educated or specially gifted to tell a story or to write" (1989:78-9). Malange has pointed out that as more and more women become part of the organised labour force, they have to "change patriarchal attitudes, share the double shift, and achieve higher wages and better working conditions" (1989:78). Pointing out that the campaigns on women's issues that succeeded "were pushed by women themselves" (1989:79) Malange addresses the nature of women's participation in performance culture:

> Performance culture means the presentation in public of plays, music, dance and poetry. Participation in performances - both acting and the performance of poetry - is a powerful experience and... [t]he absence of women in this field is therefore particularly distressing, because in performance culture they have a platform for expressing their anger, their perspective and an opportunity to conscientize their audience. Furthermore, it is important for women to realize their potential and extend their self-confidence as participants in the struggle for cultural transformations (1989:78).

Most worker-artists tend to use materials near to hand. Fugitive forms of expression have come into existence amidst indifference and hostility from the dominant, and without cultural precedent or authority, as Brett (1986), Barber (1987) and Mattelart and Siegelaub (1983) have pointed out. By adapting traditional forms to suit the demands of the period, the industrial environment and the new political challenges, worker poets have made significant contributions to the development of South African literature through oral poetry:

> oral poetry, thought by many to be a dead tradition or the preserve of chiefly praises, resurfaced as a voice of ordinary black workers and their struggles (Sitas in Qabula, Hlatshwayo and Malange, 1986:3-4).

When he was a shop steward Alfred Temba Qabula composed *izibongo* for a Metal and Allied Workers' Union annual general meeting in 1984. Qabula drew upon the praise form, a distinctive and old art form with socio-political resonances, to raise workers' consciousness of their union and its role in their lives. His performance acted as a catalyst:

> he released an untapped source of popular energy which, without warning, exploded everywhere... in the context of labour struggles and their mass-gatherings.
>
> Ordinary black workers with performing and rhetorical power began orating their poetry in Zulu, using all the elements they could gather from their cultural formations to express a new sense of self-identity. Hundreds of workers have been performing their poetry since 1984 - some of it vibrant, some of it an index of assertiveness and defiance, some of it written first and then recited, some of it totally spontaneous (Sitas, 1989a:47).

Qabula related that after he started performing, "all the poets came out", for, as Sitas explains:

> [f]ar from being the product of colonial domination, or a sign of backwardness the poetry of Vilane, Zondi, Qabula and Hlatshwayo, and many

> more is... the consummate result of a struggle by people who have a large immediate audience, a clear organizational project, to create a popular poetry that is OF the people, as the people are changing themselves and the world around them (1989a:56).

Through poems that are innovative while expressing continuity, the worker poets contested the monopoly of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) over Zulu cultural traditions, just as they challenged the IFP's claim to inheriting the mantle of Zulu resistance to colonialism. In their use of the praise form the poets Qabula, Vilane, Zondi, Hlatshwayo and Ntanzi showed the

> symbols of the Zulu past being lured away from an aggressive ethnic nationalism and put to the service of a wider, more egalitarian cause [which] challenges the notion that oral forms belong to the margins of contemporary life (Gunner, 1986:37).

Sitas confirms this view of the progressive politics of the worker *izimbongi* in his reference to the work of Hlatshwayo as a chronicler, who

> *consciously* transform[s] tradition propelled by a future he longs for as opposed to the izimbongi of KwaZulu who are attempting to *preserve* social hierarchy by linking it to the past (1986:52).

Gunner goes on to argue that the *izimbongi* "hold the centre stage in the attempt to define contemporary worker consciousness in South Africa" (1986:37), which is supported by Sitas' assessment of the COSATU oral poets: "They do not have to imagine themselves to be people's bards, they are that" (1986:56).

Dikobe wa Mogale's written poem "bantwini ngcipe's testament" (1984:46-49) represents the confidence and authority of the oral poets:

> i come from a lineage of warriors
> and we know martyrs are not born
> but tempered like steel in the furnace of struggle

While the poem as a whole focuses on the national liberation struggle, there is reference in these lines to the conservative and the reactionary forces among the oppressed, who have traditionally drawn their legitimacy from the heroes of the past. Like Qabula and Hlatshwayo, Wa Mogale (who was a COSATU organiser in Pietermaritzburg) treats Bambhata and Shaka as an integral part of the history of the liberation of the working class (as the industrial image of the furnace suggests). For Wa Mogale (as for Qabula, Hlatshwayo and Madlizinyoka Ntanzi) the subject in the line "i come from a lineage of warriors" refers as much to the political activist as to the poet.

Many poems began to appear in worker newspapers, pamphlets and other publications. To (partially) address the problems of access, and the linguistic diversity, poets like Qabula, Malange and Hlatshwayo published Zulu and English versions of their texts (eg., *Black Mamba Rising* (1986), *izinsingizi* (1989), *A Working Life: Cruel Beyond Belief* (1989) and *Ear to the Ground* (1991). A great deal of worker literature is dual medium at the least. As a

result worker poets "do not have to worry about 'proper' English, they compose in the languages they know leaving the translation of their work mostly to others" (Sitas, 1986:56). However, while the print medium increases access among (literate) workers, the printed poem that is extracted from the context of performance tends to lose much of its oral power, its songs, chants, ululations, improvisations and audience participation (Sitas in Qabula, Hlatshwayo and Malange, 1986:2). Other media, such as video and audio tapes have proven to be more effective than print.

Notes:

1. For additional information refer to Barrett et al (1985) and Meer (1990).

2. The stanza recalls the photograph by Lesley Lawson of an office cleaner working on her hands and knees in the middle of a large boardroom table, to polish it (Badsha and Wilson, 1986:152).

3. Among the oppressed minorities (Coloureds and Indians were the largest groups) class distinctions were far more discernable (although most of the middle class people in these groups were about a generation away from having been working class). But these groups were often too tiny or too hegemonised by the ideology of apartheid to play a significant role in building class solidarity across race.

4. In 1986 Inkatha launched the United Workers Unions of South Africa (UWUSA), which started out by launching a series of bitter attacks on COSATU.

5. Chapman offers two different dates for the playscript, 1979 (1996:353) and 1981 (1996:498).

6. The poet's surname has not been supplied, but it is quite likely that she is Boitumelo Makhema.

7. In 1906 the dispossession of African people resulted from the British imposition of crippling poll, cattle and hut taxes. To try to meet their debts, many people were forced to seek work in the white mines and factories. Any resistance, such as Bambatha's, was ruthlessly quelled.

8. For developments in the 1990s refer to Bonnin (1995:9-12).

9. The play was staged in 1989-90. A version of the script appears in Ngema's publication *The Best of Mbongeni Ngema: An Anthology* (1995:127-191).

10. This was captured in a well-known photograph by Eric Miller (*Weekly Mail*, 24.4.87:1).

11. Paulus Zulu offers the following explanation of the growth of physical violence among the oppressed, in a society with a long history of repressive structural violence:

> As the state meets each challenge with growing repression, from sheer brutal forms such as baton charging to teargas and shooting, to more sophisticated forms such as banning and detention, so has the potential for violence from the resistance

groups grown. In essence, violence is not on the formal agenda of resistance groupings, but is often a momentary response or retaliation to more organised violence by the State (Meer, 1989:18).

Chapter Seven: Representivity and representation

7.1 Audience: addressing the active subjects of the resistance struggle

> ...the ordinary daily lives of people shold be the direct focus of political interest because they constitute the *very content* of the struggle, for the struggle involves people not abstractions (Ndebele, 1991:55).

South Africans have struggled to construct themselves as a part of a common society. Like most colonized societies, South Africa has been at the mercy of an array of political and cultural forces, the most powerful of which have been the dominant minorities. Central to the challenges of representation is "the problem of who 'we' are when we speak" (Barrett, 1991:162). In a society in which only 870 000 (out of a total of 40 million people) returned the minority National Party government to power in 1987, it was recognised that while representation has to do with ideology, subjectivity and meaning, it is as closely tied to politics, the law and the state.

In a country built on the division of the majority, resistance writers contributed to the struggle by affirming, and implicitly uniting, the oppressed as the intended audiences of their literature. The affirmation of audiences who have otherwise been neglected or marginalised is part of the assertion that these audiences are not to be discounted, either politically or culturally. Given the pressure of the competing claims of censors, publishers and conservative liberal critics, resistance writers developed great clarity regarding their intended readers as they mobilised their art against domination. This, in turn, had a profound influence on the nature of their cultural production.

Through the struggle resistance writers realised that they had to offer more than a language of critique, and explored the constructive and liberatory capacities of their medium as they committed skills and other resources to the political resistance. At the same time the struggle rescued culture from its colonial dependencies, and from being fragmented and marginalized; giving content and materiality to that which had been inchoate. In turn the popular-democratic literature of the 1970s and 1980s helped inaugurate and establish a determinedly post-colonial culture, which struggled to free itself from the accretions of history, willed its psychological independence and went beyond the configurations that existed to address and serve the interests of its emerging audience.

> South African writers have begun to forge a genuine literature of the people: a literature in which the spectator and the reader have acquired an importance that is perhaps unprecedented in the history of literature: a literature which reflects back to its readers their struggle for emancipation, and at the same time reinvigorates them for that very struggle: a literature which has abandoned the universities and the comfortable living rooms of the intellectuals in favour of the streets (Watts, 1989:37).

While the conservative liberal approach to literature tends to privilege the individual consciousness, the literature of resistance tends to articulate a "criticism and transcendence of literary individualism" (Vaughan, 1986:213). More than that, resistance writers had to find effective ways of constructing and relating to their intended audiences. Owing to the problems of education, language competence, access and financial considerations, many communities of readers had to be willed, strategised and imagined into being. Many poets and playwrights chose to forego the privilege of literary distance, despite their manifest skills, and began to use voices that are recognisably their own, as they tried to involve their audiences by developing a sense of community. This was a key goal of the struggle for liberation, and it involved developing the cultural and political agency of the oppressed.

Among other poets, Mtshali, Serote and Gwala's poetry is closely based on the experiences of oppressed communities and is directed to those communities. However, Michael Chapman has disputed this, arguing that

> Although the Soweto poet has tended to give his poetry a populist emphasis, the ideal of the "people" should be seen primarily as a mental construct (1984:198).

The evidence suggests otherwise and the rest of this section will examine that. However, in his assertion Chapman makes two errors: he conflates populism with the popular (the differences have been addressed in the introduction), and he generalises about four poets, through his stereotype of "Soweto poets" (which is inaccurate, as was addressed earlier). Given the generalisation, reference to one of the so-called Soweto poets should be sufficient.

In an interview with Chapman Serote addressed the issue of the intended audience of his poem *No Baby Must Weep* (1975): "It's directed at Africans in particular... it's Africans who hold the tools of liberation in South Africa" (Chapman, 1982:114). This has patently been the case with Serote's subsequent work as well. Neither did the special branch police seem to subscribe to the idea that the resistance poetry of Serote, Gwala and Mtshali was not directed to oppressed people (among other secondary audiences[1]), as their actions against these and other writers suggest. If oppressed people were an abstraction to these writers then they would have been rejecting the means by which their work would be most effective. In any event this contradicted their politics.

The best evidence for Serote's contention may be found in the way he constructed his implied reader. After he wrote *Yakhal'inkomo* (1972) Serote spent nine months in solitary confinement in 1973, and was released without charges being brought against him. The experience of solitary confinement seems to have sharpened the poet-activist's sense of who his audience should be and the nature of that relationship, as his subsequent work indicates. Characterised by a sense of urgency that the oppressed in South African society speak among themselves as well as for themselves, Serote's subsequent poetry represents a powerful affirmation of the emerging audience of South African poetry in English.

Serote's experiments with the construction of the speaker chart his intensifying political involvement, from the "I" (uppercase) of *Yakhal'inkomo* (1972) and *Tsetlo (1974)* (with a few exceptions in the latter) to the "i" (lowercase) of *No Baby Must Weep (1975)*, "Behold Mama,

Flowers" (1978:11-61) and "Poem: on Distances"(1978:66). As the political situation deteriorated Serote ceased to use the literary device of the singular persona, for it suggested an artistic transcendence of reality while few South Africans remained safe from the state. Serote gave up the class-based privilege of distance/abstraction in literature, the better to represent and develop his identification with ordinary people. In this way he affirms the cultural and ideological significance of ordinary people.

Although writers like Serote and Keorapetse Kgositsile were severed from their communities by having to go into exile, they endeavoured in their work to speak in community. Serote gave up the lyric form and his experiments with long autobiographical poems, and began to use didactic and rallying forms, participating as a poet-activist in the liberation struggle.

Among the most striking developments in Serote's poetry are the substantive changes his notion of speaker undergoes, beginning with well-delineated personae who are constructed to convey strategic messages, to the elimination of distance between speaker and poet. This happens as the poetry becomes more militant and the distance between the poet and the dominant interpretive community develops, while, conversely, the distance in the poems between the poet and his implied readers closes. The efforts of resistance writers both within and outside the country to make critical opposition a part of the general opposition was important to the popular-democratic struggle that was developing.

The poem "Time Has Run Out" (1982b:125-134) marks the transition in Serote's work from the individual to the collective mode: beginning with the "i"-speaker, the poem seeks to elicit responses from the reader/audience, through the familiarity of the colloquial South Africanisms "listen"(126) and "remember" (127), which precede the introduction of the pronoun "we". Besides "Time has Run Out"(1982a:1-14), the pronoun "we" predominates in the following poems: "For those of us who make music" (1978:67), "Shadows in Motion: Bra Zeke Mphahlele"(1978:68), "When Lights Go Out"(1978:69-70), "Heat and Sweat" (1978:71), "Matshidiso: Past Footsteps"(1978:73-4), "Song of Experience"(1978:75-78), "Child of the Song"(1978:79-80), "Notes for a Fighter"(1978:81-84), "Modes of Introits from Familiar Sights" (1978:85-86); "Notes"(1982a:20-22), "The Long Road"(1982a:27-30); "No More Strangers"(1982b:135-137), "The Breezing Dawn of the New Day"(1982b:138-141) and "Excerpts from There will be a better time" (1982b:142-144); while *A Tough Tale* (1987) intersperses both the singular and plural forms of the pronoun. These developments in Serote's work are linked to his concern to support the socio-political development of his embattled audience, as "Modes of Introits from Familiar Sights" (1978:85-86) suggests:

> our tongues having survived throttling assaults
> we will keep a simple speech (1978:85).

The poem concludes with the exhortation

> we must know we have only one life
> it cannot be wasted in thirst, or, death can be a way of saying
> things (1978:86).

In "There will be a Better Time" (1982b:142-4) Serote focuses more thoroughly on the project of willing faith in the transformation that was desired. This he attempts to do through the strategic elision of "we" and "will":

> if the we is the most of us
> and the most of us is the will
> the will to say no
> when the most of us will create a better time
> there will be a better time (1982b:142)

The poem advances to affirm the value of the collective will:

> yes there will be a better time because we say so
> there will be a better time because like our warriors
> we make a better time and many of us know that we can and must
> there will be a better time (1982b:143)

It is in the content of the pronoun "we" that the popular-democratic impetus is seen most clearly in its difference from the poetic models of western high culture (the style favoured by critics such as Lionel Abrahams and Stephen Watson). Believing in the necessity for oppressed people to see themselves as a cohesive group, the poet attempts to enable that process. Given the needs and the toll of the struggle, he chooses to emphasise the generative aspect of cultural productivity. His reservations regarding his achievements explain the drive that informs his mission:

> I have always wanted to be guided in my writing by the aspirations of my people. However, in none of my poetry collections so far do I fully understand this collective creativity (Chapman, 1982:113).

From his earliest poems Serote, in common with other politically committed poets, worked to reinforce the significance of the disempowered majority who have long challenged their silencing by race, class and cultural minorities. The resistance writers had to deal with the problems of communication under scrutiny and domination, in a language still very much under the control of the dominant.

Much of Serote's experimentation arises out of his concern with how well he, as a writer, is able to reach his intended audience. By leaving his poems manifestly open and incomplete, Serote places great responsibility upon his audience as active participants in the production of meaning. Serote understands the role of the artist to be that of a co-developer of his/her culture. This inclusive sense of development has to do with the poet's recognition of the role of intellectuals and cultural activists in the larger scheme of the struggle for liberation, which is quite different from didacticism. In this Serote seems to be guided by the role of the poet in the indigenous oral tradition. Sepamla, Gwala and Mtshali show evidence of this as well, as do many other writers, such as Madingoane, Manaka, (the early) Ngema and Mhlope.

Serote uses an innovative set of structural devices to engage with his intended audience in his *Behold Mama, Flowers* (1978) collection. He fuses the techniques of jazz music and the oral traditions, as is evident in his use of a declamatory style and formulaic statements. Derived from the local oral tradition, the formulaic statements comprise particular refrains, choruses and chants that serve as repetitive structures to give coherence to the performance poems. A good example is the long and sprawling title poem, "Behold Mama, Flowers" (1978:11-61),

in which the progression of refrains render and advance the development of the successive themes of memory and forgetting ("how can I forget"), injury and forgiveness ("how can I forgive"), as well as engendering ("what do we want") and envisioning ("what will happen now") the future. The open-ended nature of the refrains suggests Serote's intention to engage the audience in a dialogue that anticipates development. The impetus of these refrains is opposed by the refrain which suggests the delays and the frustration that characterise the interregnum ("inside this hour/of intensely long and dragging movement"). Some relief is offered in the refrain "the bright eye of the night keeps whispering", which suggests the support of natural elements in the drama of liberation. This serves to affirm the justness of the struggle against the dominant propaganda. The concluding refrain offers a model for assertive subjectivity in the reflexive declaration "I can say". Built upon a ritualised set of declamatory questions, the concluding formula takes the poem into the realm of prophecy.

Poems such as these depend upon the response of the audience for closure. The poet eschews the writer-reader hierarchy, and affirms his faith in his audience as comrades in the struggle to produce a more equitable society. This is a public and mobilizing form of art, closely involving and representing its audience in its processes. Such poems construct spaces where voices that have been fragmented, dislocated, marginalised and silenced in South Africa can find a forum, in this way anticipating the developments in the labour and the mass democratic movements in the 1980s. In this poem Serote also shows how literature can be invigorated and directed by the struggle for political and cultural freedom: "this is a communication which is not just content to bring communication to the masses, but seeks to liberate their speech" (Getino in Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983:22). The extensive experimentation that characterises the work of the resistance writers of the 1970s and 1980s is linked to their conviction that literature could change their audience's "perception not only of reality, but also of art - of what it is and what its potential role could be" (Brett, 1986:10).

Peter Horn has identified the audience as the main focus of a poet's activity. In his list of the functions of poetry Horn emphasises the development of the generative capacity of the reader or audience. This involves making the structure of reality visible, helping the reader understand that reality can be changed, investigating with the reader how this can be done, and helping the reader understand that literature is a collective undertaking requiring writer and reader to work together to produce meaning (1994:18). Written long after Serote's poems, Horn's list comes close to characterising Serote's practice. Horn's list also applies to resistance drama.

Many dramatists synthesised "creativity and social responsibility" (Gordimer, 1988a:243). In the late 1970s the community arts project, Soyikwa, was established (and is still running), under the directorship of Matsemela Manaka. Extending the socially committed role of cultural workers, Soyikwa worked in the rural areas from 1985. Zakes Mda did the same with the Maratholi travelling theatre that he set up in rural Lesotho.

The plays *Woza Albert!* (Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, 1983) and *Asinamali* (Ngema, 1985) are also based on the conviction that the transformation of society is not possible without the integral involvement of ordinary people. Both plays draw upon song, dance, mime, narrative, history, and didactic tracts to entertain, record and educate with the purpose of inciting people

to struggle. Notwithstanding Ngema's subsequent work these are not populist plays: the audience is affirmed and challenged by turns to develop into active subjects.

The focal points that both plays set up are deflected: the only presence that Morena has in *Woza Albert!* (1983) is through the representations of Mbongeni and Percy, and likewise, the only presence that Msizi Dube has in *Asinamali* (1985) is through the recollections of the character Bhoyi Ngema. The diminution of the focal characters is matched by the absence of a main character in either play. These strategies suggest that both plays seek to affirm more egalitarian values, such as the conviction that all the characters are important in the struggle, and that the reader/audience cannot expect some saviour to deliver all their needs. Both *Woza Albert!* and *Asinamali* offer the audience affirming representations of oppressed people as active and dynamic characters, and challenge the audience to reciprocate.

Though well entertained, the audiences of *Woza Albert!* (1983) and *Asinamali* (1985) are not allowed to treat theatre as a vehicle for escapism, but continually exhorted to take responsibility for the destruction of oppression. Although *Woza Albert!* seems to be stirring characters like Albert Lutuli, Percy or Mbongeni into political action, the main target of the play is the audience. *Woza Albert!* expressly challenges its audiences not to accept the state's construction of themselves as passive subjects and meekly await some distant and transcendental solution to their miseries (in the afterlife), but to take responsibility for transformation. The opening scene uses a jazz performance to illustrate its principal theme:

> *On the first note of their music, overhead lights come on, sculpting them. They become an instrumental jazz band, using only their bodies and their mouths - double bass, saxophone, flute, drums, bongos, trumpet etc. At the climax of their performance, they transform into audience, applauding wildly* (1983:1)

Such an introduction challenges the audience about their potential as active subjects who have the capacity to transmute themselves, their oppressed bodies, voices and psyches into the instruments they need to produce the situation they desire. The play illustrates its contention immediately and wittily, as the actors begin to take over the role of the audience, to give themselves the applause they think their performance deserves.

The location of *Asinamali* in a prison (the analogy to South Africa is evident) serves as a foil for the exuberance of the characters Solomzi Bisholo, Thami Cele, Bongani Hlophe, Bheki Mqadi, Bhoyi Ngema. All the characters take their real names, which suggests that the play is less about fiction than about the experiences of black people in the 1980s. Each character offers a stark yet humourous representation of how he ended up in prison. All the narratives challenge the legitimacy of the state and its system of justice.

> Black writers arrived, out of their own situation, at Brecht's discovery: their audience needed to be educated to be *astonished at the circumstances under which they functioned.* They began to show blacks that their living conditions are their story (Gordimer, 1988a:229).

Asinamali is intensely serious in its engagement with the day-to-day struggles of ordinary citizens. This is clearest when Bhoyi Ngema suddenly confronts the audience over the first step towards challenging oppression:

> *Bhoyi Ngema*: the problem... is not only about the language Afrikaans, not only about rent increases, not only job reservation or working conditions, not only about gold, not only about diamonds, not only about sugar cane in Natal, not only about winelands in the Cape, not only about bloody fucking passbooks, not only about the vote, not only about the bloody Immorality Act. What is it? What is it? Tell me, what is it? Talk! What is it? Eh? What is it? [*Looking directly at the camera, he pauses.*] You think I am playing games with you? You think I'm acting? I'm not playing games, man. My friend, you've got to look for it. You've got to look for it. It's deep down in your heart.

By challenging its audience to engage with the socio-political issues this early play of Ngema's expresses, with Serote's corpus and Ingoapele Madingoane's "black trial" (1979), the conviction that without their active participation there can be no solution to the problems of oppression.

Asinamali (1985) has high expectations of its audiences. One of the narratives deals with a worker who tries to organise other workers to address the exploitation that is occurring. However, his "cousin the boss boy" informs on him and he is fired. The other prisoners are unsympathetic and dismiss him as a fool for risking his job. Yet, the prisoners lavish praise on Bra Tony, the flamboyant crook who exploits his own friends. Bra Tony is more famous and inspires more admiration from the prisoners than the stalwart of the Lamontville rent boycott, Msizi Dube. But *Asinamali* does not patronise its audiences, leaving them to judge these characters and situations. This play of Ngema's shows faith and respect for the critical acumen of its audiences (which his subsequent plays lack).

The late-1980s play *So where to* by Smal Ndaba also addressed the development of the audience seriously. The co-director Phyllis Klotz explained that *So where to* wanted to use theatre as a political and social tool to enable its audiences to examine "where we are, who we are and where we want to go at this particular point in time" (*New Nation*, 17.11.89:15). Maintaining that the time for simple solutions was over, she declared:

> I want to prepare people psychologically for a new society. You can rid the country of the laws, but its the people who have to take the democratic freedom into their hands (1989:15).

Peter Ngwenya's workshopped production *Children of the Street* was based on the experiences of Soweto street children as well as his own experience of homelessness. He concentrated on popularising children's theatre in order "to take it to the streets and the backyards of Soweto, and to reach more and more members of the community" (*New Nation*, 18.2.88:11). Ngwenya's emphasis on the relationship between performers and audience was typical of a great deal of cultural work of the 1980s. Like Serote, Ngwenya also believed that the artist has as much to learn from ordinary people as the audience/reader could learn from the artist. There is the understanding that

> literature is a collective undertaking, in the sense that the writer does not merely hold up a mirror for the reader to look into, but that they both grapple together for the meaning of reality (Horn,1994:18).

While plays like *Asinamali* (1985) challenge their audiences about their position in apartheid society, Dikobe wa Mogale reassures his readers that "revolutionaries are people like you" (1992:8-10), contesting the government's portrayal of activists as external agents ("communists") or malcontents:

> revolutionaries are people like you and me
> ordinary people from ordinary homes
> trying their best to make the world
> a better place than they found it

Serote offers a very simple and effective demonstration of the scale of responsibility that rests upon the audience in the conclusion to "When Lights Go Out" (1978:69-70), which was written years before the mass marches of the mid- and late-1980s. The challenge in the poet's concluding statement suggests that what the reader derives from such a (necessarily) cryptic statement has to do with what the reader is prepared to put into it:

> only if we know how, can we harness time -
> can you hear the footsteps.

7.2 The rise of the United Democratic Front

> How... can [oppressed] classes, groups and individuals... create and imagine another form of uniting amongst themselves, and relating to others? (Mattelart, 1983:17).

Given their historical position, a united front offered oppressed people the most viable position from which to try to overcome the structures of domination. In the early poem "Hurricane in a splintering skull" (1974:31-2) Peter Horn prophesied the unity of the oppressed, that they could challenge the state's agenda of division and disempowerment:

> For there burning like grief
> and brighter than morning a cry.
> The cry of a people
> smashing their cells and their
> ghettoes (1974:32).

The speaker hails the one resource that oppressed South Africans could count on to challenge the agenda of the state:

> I greet
> the audible the visible
> a new
> word: Together (1974:32).

The United Democratic Front (UDF) was launched in Cape Town in August 1983. The organisation consisted of a loose alliance of about 600 community organisations, trade unions, youth structures, student societies, residents associations, religious groups, political organisations and professional associations. Zinjiva Winston Nkondo may have referred to such a development in "The Long Road: The Tunnel" (1990:10):

> all my people are on this road
> for this road is the road of life[2]

The UDF arose out of a need for a united national opposition to the constitutional proposals of the Botha regime. The resistance to the "reforms" of the Botha government galvanised around protests against the proposed tricameral system. During the national resistance to the whites-only referendum on the new constitution in November 1983 the following ditty, reflecting the slogan *sekunjalo* in the last line, was sung:

> We want all our rights,
> We want them here (in a united South Africa)
> And we want them now
> Now is the time! (Hill and Harris, 1989:128).

The UDF-led boycott of the 1984 constitutional reforms and "community" council elections subverted the state's attempts to implement superficial and piecemeal reforms. The boycott action was aimed at mustering support, and at forcing the state and the private sector to negotiate. Resistance groups attempted "to isolate the state from all constituencies" and to "reject participation and co-operation with state-created institutions at all levels" (Zulu in Meer, 1989:17). The UDF's broad programme of opposition to apartheid led to a new phase of militant, sustained and organised opposition to the Botha government (Campbell in Nyong'o, 1987:154). In addition to its nationally co-ordinated campaign against the tricameral system, the UDF's strategies varied from petitions and peaceful defiance to open confrontation.

As the political contradictions of the regime sharpened, so did the organisational capacity of the oppressed, with the UDF as the principal instrument of oppressed solidarity and action in the 1980s. The state cracked down on extra-parliamentary opposition at the end of 1985 by declaring a state of emergency, but through the agency of the UDF the "prestige and influence of the still-illegal ANC grew dramatically, and its banners and slogans were visible at meetings throughout the country" (Baskin, 1991:88). Besides the African National Congress (ANC), other banned organisations also made a showing. While Jeremy Cronin was in prison under charges of terrorism he wrote the poem "*Motho ke motho ka batho babang* (A person is a person because of other people)" (1983:18) which resists the state's history of criminalising

and marginalising persons and organisations that opposed it. The title draws on a Sotho proverb that celebrates community, meaning a person is a person because of other people. There are equivalents in several other languages, the Zulu *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, the Xhosa *Umtu nguntu nga banye*, the Southern Sotho *Motho ke motho ka motho e mong*, and the Setswana *Motho ke motho ka motho yoy mogwe*, which tie in to the notion of *ubuntu* (humanity). These expressions of communal solidarity serve as a counterpoint to the minority state's moves to alienate, delegitimise and exclude activists and organisations.

Realising that their strength lay in their numerical superiority, the oppressed defied the ruling logic of association through alliances across class, race, language and ideology. As Campbell points out, "the problems of wages, rent strikes, school boycotts and stay-aways pushed the masses beyond the differences which had dogged the PAC and the ANC for two decades" (Nyong'o, 1987:154). (This was not entirely accurate as a small network of BC organisations had formed another coalition, the National Forum, to oppose the state.) But for the majority of oppressed South Africans, the challenges that they faced helped them overcome old histories of difference and disparities in ideology.

The effectiveness of the resistance movement may be gauged from its growth, despite the states of emergency, from about 600 affiliates at its launch to about 1000 affiliates in 1989 (*New Nation*, 3.3.89:7). The effect of the mobilisation of ordinary people was captured in a half-serious, half-comic chant that was heard among the barricades of Athlone township in 1985:

> All the mothers and the fathers,
> the brothers and the sisters,
> the grandmothers and the grandfathers,
> the dogs and the cats -
> they all have joined in the struggle
> (Hill and Harris, 1989:32).

Central to the UDF culture was a sense of a grassroots, participatory democracy: "Democratic structures, mass participation and greater accountability were principles formulated in the day-to-day struggles" (Campbell in Nyong'o, 1987:153). Campbell further argues that given the level of participation of the popular masses,

> the question of whether the democracy of the UDF was ideologically sound from the formalist point of view paled as the concrete issues in the communities took precedence in the campaigns (Nyong'o, 1987:154).

Social, political and economic justice was integral to this notion of democracy. There was also the pervasive assumption that there was an inseparable link between national liberation and social emancipation.

The popular-democratic nature of the UDF is apparent in its goals, which Campbell lists as

> the right to decent housing, to fair rents, to decent services, to fair wages, to equality before the law, the right to equal education, to work, to decent working conditions, to strike, to freedom of movement, the right to

> democratic representation, freedom of association, freedom of expression and ultimately the right to life (Nyong'o, 1987:154).

The UDF demanded the unbanning of political organisations and individuals, the freeing of political prisoners and detainees, the freedom of political exiles to return, the removal of troops from the townships, and the depoliticisation of the functions of the police in the townships (Zulu in Meer, 1989:14-15). Given the refusal of the state to concede any of these demands, battles for control over the townships occurred between the army and residents.

The townships were a key arena for the organisation and consolidation of resistance in the 1980s. Community organisations tried to make the townships "ungovernable" by the state supported community councils and local affairs councils. Alternative structures such as civic organisations, student councils and professional organizations were created to replace the state structures that exacerbated the suffering they were supposed to alleviate (Zulu in Meer, 1989,17-18). Street committees organised basic services, disciplinary committees addressed crime prevention, conflict resolution, and the punishment of offenders, while defence committees protected residents against the security forces. Dikobe wa Mogale's "poem for sobantu" (1984:43), celebrates the unity of a township with few resources besides solidarity during an SADF terror attack, as Solomzi Bisholo does in his narrative about the battle in Sebokeng, in Mbongeni Ngema's *Asinamali* (1985).

The townships were used as a matrix to form tactical alliances between residents, youth and ad hoc structures to address specific issues. For instance, student groupings, unions, unemployed youth, commuters and taxi operators united in bus boycotts against the unilateral fare hikes that the transport monopoly Putco tried to institute. Some of the initiatives of UDF affiliates were even more threatening to the state than resistance. The Cradock Residents' Association (CRADORA), which was led by Matthew Goniwe, mounted a programme of broad political mobilization. One of the outcomes was that local councillors resigned their posts and CRADORA facilitated their reintegration into the community (Saul and Gelb, 1986:222).

The need for fresh initiatives to deal with the inequitable power relations, for new forms of organising and organisational structures, is addressed in James Matthews' poem "am i a fly entwined" (1990:17) which construes unity as a source of oppositional power:

> i am a tiger, a panther
> who has broken oppressive cages
> i shall stalk the streets
> find the friendship of my kind
> together we shall be a band
> of each and every colour
> gaining strength drinking water
> drawn from a poisoned well

The "friendship of my kind" that Matthews refers to was quite significant to the strength of the resistance, and quite the opposite of what apartheid, with its texts of difference, had ordained.

The actor John Ledwaba and the director Christo Leach met and established a theatre company when Ledwaba went to stay in Crown Mines, the old mining village between Soweto and Johannesburg that was the last surviving non-racial residential area in Johannesburg.[3] They set up The Mamu Players, a non-profit-making company, with the aim of contributing to the process of transformation. Their play *Township Boy* is based on the senseless shooting of a Diepkloof youngster, Howard Diale, by a council policeman during a running battle between the "comrades" and "Botha's boys" in 1986 (*New Nation*, 16.7.87:12). Council police had a dismal record of indiscipline, assault and crime. Referred to as "*kitskonstabels*" (instant cops) they were often recruited from vigilantes, hastily trained and sent to "keep order" in the townships (Webster and Friedman, 1989:24). This was a cynical ploy by the state to divide and rule the townships. The central character in *Township Boy* is "a people's poet" whose "words of freedom win him a leading role in the struggle" (*New Nation*, 30.6.88:22) Townships across the country had been subjected to the "green beans" (a reference to the uniforms of the council police), and the topical and spirited play drew on the mobilising and energizing possibilities of the medium to express residents' rejection of them. A cassette of songs and music from the play was produced by Shifty Records.

The rallying principle against apartheid was democracy, with Nelson Mandela as the symbol. The UDF gave historical significance to local struggles by linking them to the struggles of the 1950s and before. The heroes, songs, symbols and legends of this period were seen as part of its heritage and ennobled the day-to-day struggles with a "moral and emotional weightiness" (Price, 1991:180-1) that fuelled the insurrection. The notion of democracy to which the liberation movement subscribed had its roots in the *Freedom Charter* (1954), which the security police continued to try to suppress.

The UDF drew on Enoch Sontonga and Samuel Mqhayi's "*Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika*" (God Bless Africa) as its anthem. The anthem, which which is used by a broad spectrum of community and resistance organisations (from the Azanian People's Organisation to Inkatha), has served at meetings, rallies, marches, funerals, commemorations, the burial of martyrs, the launch of trade unions, the resolve of rent boycotters facing the security forces, and as the basis of the national anthems of several neighbouring states. As the struggle intensified in the 1980s the performance of the song in UDF circles changed from the plagal, low-toned, melancholy hymn to a quick-paced, sonorous, and confident paean to the anticipated victory.[4]

The UDF articulated a "culture of liberation" in which the local struggles of groups such as workers, township residents, commuters, scholars and conscripts were contextualised as components of the national struggle against white minority rule. People were encouraged to resist in the knowledge that their local actions contributed to the national struggle.

Concerns that the number and diversity of member organisations would turn the UDF into a flaccid, amorphous organisation were largely unfounded. As it turned out, the absence of a cohesive framework gave the democratic movement some protection against the state. While affiliates across the country were able to engage in a range of resistance activities as members of the national liberation movement and count on the co-ordinating structures of the UDF, the state found it difficult to destroy the UDF by isolating each of its structures for legislation or prosecution. At the same time the national and legal standing of the UDF served to strengthen various unorganised sectors to deal with the onslaught of the state. Such affiliates were able

to draw on the experience and expertise of a range of church, professional, labour and business structures in the network.

To contest the power of the apartheid state with any chance of success required the broadest possible alliance of forces, across class, race, "ethnicity", region, gender etc. While the struggle took a non-racial form, South Africans were not simply fighting for non-racialism: the struggle was over the control of state power. The strength of the principle of nonracialism lay in the way it deconstructed the basis of white power. The principle helped the UDF gain the support of small sectors of the more privileged minorities who contributed their skills and influence towards achieving a democratic state. It also strengthened the support of many western nations for the liberation front. However, adopting the principle involved the sacrifice of alliances with black and African nationalist groups, such as the Pan Africanist Congress and the Azanian People's Liberation Organisation. Class proved to be a more intractable issue for the mass democratic movement.

By offering a framework for addressing and contesting contradictions, the UDF network allowed for the deepening of democratic processes. The movement enabled disparate ideological groupings (from communists to entrepreneurs) to contend on questions such as the economy of a liberated South Africa. The UDF's ideological ambiguity lay in the fact that while it was unreservedly anti-racist, it was not entirely anti-capitalist. This was defended as being strategically necessary to the development of sufficient unity to challenge the state, and to win international support. At the same time the broad nature of the UDF allowed for the unity and the independence of its affiliates. The downside of such a strategy, as with the appeal to the black *comprador* bourgeoisie elements running the homelands, was that the socialist ideals gradually receded. Nevertheless, significant sections of the UDF continued to hold socialist goals. Given the scale of inequity in South Africa the intervention of a post-apartheid state in reconstruction, development and redistribution was critical for significant redress to occur.

The unity that developed under the UDF represented a considerable achievement, given the history of systematic division. However, the challenge that the UDF had to address was that the unity of the oppressed could not be taken for granted or subordinated to nationalist ideals (which tend, as other struggles have demonstrated, to be petit bourgeois and male). The mass democratic movement also ran the risk that some middle class minorities would (and did) attempt to impose undue influence on the organisation. However, on the whole, the UDF represented a productive political and cultural development out of a fusion of the strengths of different kinds of commitment to a popular-democratic dispensation.

The most prominent poet of the UDF was Mzwakhe Mbuli, who inspired thousands of youth across the country to perform his work at political meetings or to create their own performance poems and songs. Peter Horn has pointed out that Mbuli's success lay in his ability to bend the English language "to the tongue, the ear and the thinking of the township, the mass democratic movement, the street committee, the trade union meeting" (1989:185-6).

Mbuli's popularity owed as much to his message and performance style as to the methods of transmission that were used, which included setting the poems to music and performing them at concerts, and producing a series of cassettes. Barber suggests that during rapid social change

> popular art forms, with their exceptional mobility (whether through technology such as the radio, record, and cassette tape, or through physical transportation from place to place by travelling performing groups) will play a crucial role in formulating new ways of looking at things (1987:5).

While it created space for multiple voices the UDF also enabled the development of new struggles:

> As well as challenging the state, grassroots social movements also helped to redefine social and cultural relationships within the community. New roles for women in public life emerged; the relationships between generations was continually contested, debated and reformulated; conceptions of citizenship emerged premised on participation rather than helpless passivity (The Posterbook Collective, 1991:75).

Issues such as women's autonomy and equality, squatters' rights, the abolition of the death penalty, land redistribution and ecology, which were introduced by sections of the UDF, were eventually carried as part of a package of transformation proposals of the mass democratic movement as a whole.

The End Conscription Campaign organised whites against conscription and the SADF. By working closely with other resistance organisations and in community projects the ECC made a significant contribution towards the nonracial movement that developed in the 1980s. The broad-based solidarity against minority domination challenged the denial of the other that has been endemic in South Africa. There were whites who resisted the state even more actively, as became evident when they were caught, brought to trial and given harsh sentences. Some were part of the underground resistance structures of the ANC and the SACP. They included the poet and academic Jeremy Cronin, the student Karl Niehaus (who subsequently served as the ANC government's Deputy Minister for Correctional Services, and currently serves as the ambassador to Holland), the *Umkhonto we Sizwe* cadre Marion Sparg, and Derek Hanekom (currently the Minister of Land Affairs).

In "To learn how to speak" (1983:58) Cronin's use of the infinitive form of the verb is both challenging and empowering. He enables the reader to recognise that the infinitive form of the verb represents only its theoretical identity, and that a verb cannot achieve its full identity in its abstract form. A pronoun or proper noun (the subject, the reader) is critical to the action of the verb, especially if learning and free communication are to occur.

Cronin invites the reader to select the conjugation appropriate to her/his reality. This is Cronin's tactic for engaging the reader and is similar to the tactics that Serote uses from the *Behold Mama, Flowers* (1978) collection onwards to encourage the readers/audiences to take more responsibility for the production of meanings. In supplying the pronoun the reader participates in the process of becoming an active subject:

> To learn how to speak
> With the voices of this land (1983:58).

Keith Gottschalk carries the metaphor of the popular-democratic struggle into his poem "Semiotic Events" (Oliphant, 1992:463-4):

> We mobilise the alphabet into
> strong syllables, crowded, chanting, fisted.
> We deploy iambics, always rising -
> we tense: transformative.

Like Gwala, Horn, Cronin and Serote, Gottschalk effectively engages the discursive dimension of the resistance struggle, that is

> the point at which discourse becomes material power, and at which writers provide the cultural context, the language, the self-confidence, the condition of readiness for action in which the liberation struggle can take place (Watts, 1989:253).

7.3 COSATU and the UDF

> Men and women do not live by culture alone, the vast majority of them throughout history have been deprived of the chance of living by it at all, and those few who are fortunate enough to live by it now are able to do so because of the labour of those who do not (Eagleton, 1983:214).

> ... the use of the poetic form brings home the way in which [the] struggle around words and language runs parallel to the struggle to end economic and political bondage (Meintjies in Sitas, 1989b:6)

An important part of the efforts to build national unity included attempts to build an alliance between COSATU and the UDF. In the late 1970s and early 1980s the economic recession led to the loss of jobs. There were other crises, such as the rent and transport increases, and the deteriorating conditions in education. As the political turbulence increased the unions began to play an increasingly political role.

Within the organised labour movement there was much debate about the relationship between national liberation, democracy and worker power, as FOSATU tried to maintain its independence from the "populists" for reasons of principle and survival:

> Initially the [industrial] trade unions... shied away from uniting openly with the political organisations. Unions feared that the state repression of "political" activity would invite retaliation that subverted workers' gains. They believed a union's function of addressing shop-floor issues was weakened by political activism, and that the union's principle of democratic accountability to its members would be difficult to maintain (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:129).

The "workerists" were justified in maintaining that workers had to focus on developing their own resources and cultural identity. The working class is vital to social transformation in a capitalist society because it is one of the two major contending classes with access to the means of production, and the only one structurally in a position to alter the relations of production (Sole, 1985:50).

In 1979 student and community organisations supported the unions in their struggle against Fattis and Monis with a boycott of their products. In 1980 striking Ford workers were supported by the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation (PEBCO). PEBCO itself had arisen in 1980 out of links between the community and striking workers (Campbell in Nyong'o, 1987:156). Labour disputes with Wilson Rowntree and Clover Diaries were also followed by community boycotts. When the organiser of the Food and Canning Workers' Union, Neil Aggett, died in detention in 1982, the mass demonstrations across the country united the struggles of the workers and the broader community.

A large number of unionised workers participated in stayaways, consumer boycotts and other forms of mass action organised by affiliates of the UDF, and an increasing number of workers appeared to be in favour of the political direction of the UDF. About 19 of COSATU's unions, most of which were general unions such as the General and Allied Workers' Union and the South African Allied Workers' Union, affiliated to the UDF. There was another bloc of COSATU unions who were sympathetic to the UDF/ANC position, but who focused on grassroots organisation and representative democracy, such as the National Union of Mineworkers. The more independent worker bloc comprised unions such as the Metal and Allied Workers' Union, which were strongly located in the FOSATU tradition and were suspicious of nationalist politics and community organisations. They stressed working-class independence from the UDF, the ANC and the SACP (Baskin, 1991:49; 102-3). There were tensions within the worker movement on the issue of relations with the political organisations.

When COSATU was launched there was a move towards greater political involvement and an assertion of working class leadership. Cyril Ramaphosa's speech at the launch in November 1985 suggested a vision of a strong role for the federation in the political struggle for liberation:

> The formation of this congress represents an enormous victory for the working class in this country.... Never before have workers been so powerful, so united and so poised to make a mark on society... We all agree that the struggle of workers on the shop floor cannot be separated from the wider political struggle for liberation in this country.... If workers are to lead the struggle for liberation we have to win the confidence of other sectors of

> society. But if we are to get into alliances with other progressive organisations, it must be on terms that are favourable to us as workers (Baskin, 1991:54).[5]

Later in his book Baskin explains that "COSATU was launched with an ambiguous political stamp" (1991:67), which worked for its affiliates' independence and organisational unity, but which led to tensions regarding its profile and alliances.

Some COSATU unions had serious reservations about the federation's involvement in alliances with "nationalist" organisations. For instance, the National Union of Textile Workers argued that far from broadening the terrain of class politics such alliances would neutralise workers as a class in their communities. Many unionists recognised the validity of workerist arguments, but feared that an uncompromising position of independence by organised labour would amount to political abstentionism, which would leave the status quo unchallenged. Other unions endorsed more popular leanings, eg., SAAWU maintained that workers' shop-floor demands could not be separated from the rest of their lives. Such unions worked closely with civic organisations, and also earned the close attention of the security forces.

There were justifiable fears in the unions that engaging with populist (or popular) organisations would dilute the political and organisational practices of the working class and lead to the neutralisation of workers as a class in their communities (Lambert, 1987:242). There were also concerns about the statements and practices of the UDF leadership, some of whom tended to compromise the political and organisational practices of the working class (Baskin, 1991:98). Workers also had to be wary of vanguardist groups, who tended to be abstracted from the day-to day challenges of the labour movement. However, the bitter and protracted BTR Sarmcol strike in the mid-1980s compelled MAWU, a resolute "workerist" union, to

> explore a new relationship between the community and the workers. At a time when workerism and populism were the bread and butter of union debates, an alliance was forged between the strikers and the community, between union structures and the youth (Bonnin, 1995:10).

The situation required the suspension of theoretical independence for the strategic advances that were necessary and achievable, not only on the labour front but in the bid for state power.

Thabadiawa Mufamadi who was instrumental in forming the Post and Telecommunications Workers' Association (POTWA) served as Chair of the Northern Transvaal region of POTWA. He wrote "The Poet" (Oliphant, 1991:12) which focuses on the responsibilities and techniques of the worker poet-healer in the construction of worker knowledge and progress:

> An ear to the ground
> Listen to the winds
> Listen to the sound of the rivers
> Like a priest on the pulpit
> Combining bits and pieces of information
> To counter the state lie

Awakening the masses from the slumberland
I am the poet
I chart the path to power

Ordinary workers tended not to see their workplace struggles as being separate from their community struggles, just as they did not confine themselves to singing only worker songs, but also sang the freedom songs of the liberation struggle. There was much affinity between working-class culture and the culture of other sectors of oppressed people in the 1970s and the 1980s, perhaps in reaction to the divisive role of the state. In such a situation, the quality of popular democracy depended upon the relative strength of the working class within the popular alliance, and the challenge for the unions was to develop their structures to represent their diverse interests. The cultural locals that COSATU established addressed the cultural dimension of labour's challenges.

The style of worker poets tended to be shaped by both union and nationalist discourse (Gordimer, 1990:38). This is especially apparent in the poetry of the worker *izimbongi* Alfred Temba Qabula, Mi Hlatshwayo and Madlizinyoka Ntanzi. Elizabeth Gunner has described in detail how these poets lay claim to powerful symbols from the Zulu and Xhosa oral traditions:

> They show how a working class culture can show inheritance of rather than dispossession from, those nationalist and popular symbols so vital to a people's contemporary self-image.... it shows the seductive symbols of the Zulu past being lured away from an aggressive ethnic nationalism and put to the service of a wider, more egalitarian cause (1986:37).

One political context to these developments involved the Kwazulu homeland government of Chief Buthelezi, which tended to present itself as the principal heir to Zulu culture. In 1986 it engaged in an *Indaba* with conservative, white, English-speaking business interests in Natal. The allies proposed a federal KwaZulu-Natal state which would be headed by Chief Buthelezi. If this had been successful, KwaZulu-Natal, the most populous of the provinces, would no longer be part of the South African republic (supporters of the scheme had bumper stickers proclaiming an "independent" KwaZulu-Natal as "The last outpost [of the British empire]". Organised labour in the region was particularly concerned. Buthelezi's Inkatha movement had launched a rival union, the United Workers' Union of South Africa in 1986, which started off by attacking COSATU (Buthelezi had received funding for such projects from the National Party government, as F.W. de Klerk later admitted at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission).

Such a context clarifies the necessity for workers to be involved in politics beyond the workplace: at the very least the *Indaba* would have reinstated colonial and feudal relations. Given South Africa's colonial history, workers could not afford to ignore questions of citizenship and other national questions. Qabula and Hlatshwayo's praise poem "The Tears of a Creator" (1986:49-56) alludes to the complex conjuncture in which South African workers found themselves between a range of reactionary elements in the 1980s:

Here it is:
The tornado-snake of change! *Inkhanyamba*,

The cataclysm
Clammed for decades and decades

By a mountain of rules.
The tornado-snake
Poisoned throughout the years
By ethnicity
And tribalism.

Here is this mammoth creature
Which they mocked!
That it had no head!
And certainly no teeth

Woe unto you oppressor
Woe unto you exploiter

We have rebuilt its head
We have lathed its teeth on our machines.
The day this head rises
Beware of the day these teeth shall bite.

On that day:
Mountains of lies shall be torn to shreds
The gates of apartheid shall be burst asunder
the history books of deception shall be thrown out

Woza langa
Woza Federation
Woza Freedom[6]

Contrary to most expectations, working class cultural forms and content enriched the culture of resistance: as the *isibongo* demonstrates, COSATU and its affiliates "made a significant contribution towards the development and growth of a people's culture in South Africa" (*New Nation*, 30.6.89:8).

Chantal Mouffe's clarification of how people are simultaneously inscribed in a multiplicity of social relations serves to challenge the essentialisms that tend to inform analyses of labour-community relationships:

> A person's subjectivity is not constructed only on the basis of his or her position in the relations of production. Furthermore, each social position, each subject position, is itself the locus of multiple constructions, according to the different discourses that can construct that position. Thus, the subjectivity of a given social agent is always precariously and provisionally fixed (1989:90).

Demonstrating the complexity of his own location, the head of the General Workers' Union, Johnson Mpukumpa, describes the nature of his involvement in community structures:

> To have a good relationship and work together with the communities will also help us to have more strength. It would be a strange thing if I say I'm opposed to community associations, whilst I'm a worker from the community (Bond,1991:73).

The Durban FOSATU Local Cultural Group pointed out that worker cultural productions helped to break down the barriers between different groups of workers and unions and also between workers and their families and their communities (1985:74).

Leading unionists like Cyril Ramaphosa (serving the National Union of Mineworkers), Chris Dlamini (from the Food and Allied Workers) and Moses Mayekiso were actively involved in their township residents' associations. From the peculiar charge of treason brought against the MAWU leader and Alexandra activist, Moses Mayekiso, and other community leaders it was apparent that the state was threatened by any overlap of labour and community activism. This is also apparent in the reaction of the security police to Maishe Maponya's play *Umongikazi/The Nurse*:

> I was asked why I had written the play, where I got the material, and about my relationship with the Health Workers' Association (HWA - now NEHAWU), its leadership and why we had organised performances at various hospitals and clinics. I was asked what I hoped to achieve through the plays (1995:ix).

While COSATU grew from 460 000 members to 1,2 million members in 1990 (Baskin, 1991:448), other federations and unions that could have counted as allies were small. The concept of "the working class", although formidable, was not sufficiently representative, although it was more representative than most other group constructs. In any event, class does not foreclose on race, any more than it forecloses on gender. At the same time, just as class constructs could not be reduced to the popular-democratic, neither could the popular-democratic be reduced to class (Laclau, 1990:178). In March 1986 COSATU's general secretary, Jay Naidoo, clarified the federation's political approach:

> We... see it as our duty to promote working-class politics. A politics where workers' interests are paramount in the struggle. At the same time we recognise that no struggle had ever involved one social force acting alone.... Our experience has taught us firstly, to avoid isolating ourselves as workers and defining our friends and allies too narrowly, ie. the danger of workerism; and secondly, to avoid subsuming ourselves in an incoherent mass mood or desire for an ill-defined "freedom", ie. the danger of populism; and thirdly to choose our allies on the basis of what we know... and not on the basis of abstracted principles... ie. the danger of impractical but nice-sounding theories (Baskin, 1991:95).

In "The Poet" (Oliphant, 1991:12) Thabadiawa Mufamadi draws on Marx to suggest a similar position regarding the relationship between theory and labour practice:

> Transforming theory into a material force
> Converting theory into a material weapon

Like a catalyst in the struggle

From the poet's analysis, as well as from the statements of Ramaphosa and Naidoo, it appears that, despite serious reservations, COSATU tended to believe that the power of apartheid and capitalism could only be effectively challenged through a network of multiple interventions. In May 1986 Naidoo contended that workers' power was a key element in the construction of people's power in the struggle for national liberation (Lambert, 1987:240-1). The emerging "emancipatory political imaginary" (Laclau, 1990:225) arose from the intersection of class and other subject positions.

COSATU's decision not to focus solely on its own interests was also connected to its position of relative strength among the oppressed in South Africa. The federation recognised the extent of unemployment, and the fact that many people who had work were not able to join unions (eg., domestic workers, farm workers and casual workers). Thus, the labour movement sought social and political alliances not just with the middle class but with unorganised workers and with the dispossessed millions who faced even greater injustice and deprivation than themselves. While the focus of the cultural work of the labour movement has justifiably been on worker interests, COSATU cultural workers argue that worker culture is "not a city with walls around it. It is part of broader progressive culture" (Meintjies and Hlatshwayo, 1989:4). Cognisant of the scale of the challenges that the resistance movement faced, the COSATU cultural workers argued consistently that

> [u]nion-based cultural workers, toughened by their own experiences, are in a good position to assist other cultural sectors in rural areas and regions starved of cultural resources (1989:5-6).

That workers, too, had ambitions of being broadly influential is apparent in Hlatshwayo's statement regarding his literary hopes: "I wanted to be a poet, control words, many words that I may woo our multicultural South Africa into a single society" (Sitas, 1986a:52). In the literature of the 1970s and 1980s there is a profound confidence and willingness on the part of workers to engage with other producers of South African literature, as is suggested in Hlatshwayo's introduction to *Ear to the Ground*, which deals with the literature of the struggle:

> As South African workers, we enter yet another arena of battle. The field of arts. ... This volume of worker poetry is an attempt on the part of worker poets ... to leave our imprint on the pages of literary history. This volume is part of the kindling of a dialogue between us as worker poets and the literary world (Oliphant, 1991:7).

As the editors of a special edition of *Staffrider* which focused on worker culture, Meintjies and Hlatshwayo had earlier acknowledged that worker culture needed "to be sharpened into a more effective weapon" (1989:5). This runs contrary to the direction of the speech that the ANC activist Albie Sachs made later that year to ANC cadres in exile (De Kok and Press, 1990). Yet the cultural workers in the unions maintained that their plays, poems and songs had an instrumental purpose, contributing towards strengthening their workers' movement and articulating their subjectivity, as eg., the Durban Workers' Cultural Local points out in

detail (Qabula, Hlatshwayo and Malange, 1986:69-72). This is a developmental sense of the function of art, as experimental and as a process, rather than as finished product.

From the mid-1980s COSATU did not constitute workers as the sole or principal agents of liberation to the exclusion of other sectors. Such a position did not deny the specificity of working class struggles, nor did it diminish the significance of the working class in South Africa, and neither did it collapse the distinctions among the liberation forces. It was generally understood that although popular culture and working class culture overlapped at points, they could not be conflated. It was clear that workers needed to be strongly organised as an interest group, to enable them to form effective alliances with other progressive structures, as had happened in other struggles for liberation.

COSATU's influence in the middle and late 1980s was established through its attention to democratic practice. Using the discipline of mandates and reportback mechanisms and consultation processes, COSATU taught the liberation movement about transparent and accountable democratic processes. Organisations as diverse as the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW), the South African Youth Congress (SAYCO), the National Medical and Dental Association (NAMDA) and the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC), as well as the UDF, benefitted from the culture of democratic process that COSATU instituted. Middle class structures such as a national teachers' union (which eventually joined COSATU as the South African Teachers' Democratic Union) were initiated as a result of the vision, experience, resources and mediation skills of COSATU. Arising out of its concern for the development of other progressive forces in society, the worker federation set an example of cross-class solidarity.

The power of the democratic alliance of labour, community, non-governmental and professional organisations was demonstrated by the stay-aways in the Transvaal in 1984 and in Port Elizabeth in 1985:

> Stay-aways involve one of the highest forms of working class action for they ensure that not only the worker lays down tools but that his whole community is involved in a strike against capital and the state. The successful stay-aways reflected the breadth of the organisational capacity of the community leaders and the links which had been cemented between youths, workers, students and trade unions (Campbell in Nyong'o, 1987:155).

The alliance engaged in mass action, strikes, stay-aways, boycotts, and calls for sanctions and disinvestment as an alternative to military engagement (which appeared less and less feasible as the 1980s wore on and the state either infiltrated or decimated most of the armed structures). Jeremy Cronin, who went on to become a UDF leader (before having to leave the country), has a prescient image in his poem "The river that flows through our land" (1983:57), which anticipates the unity of the organisations that affiliated to the UDF, as well as the ideological convergence of COSATU and the UDF:

> A swift stream in the high mountains, dropping dental, lateral
> Clicking in its palate like the flaking of stone tools;
> And a wide river that grazes the plains,
> Lows like the wind in summer maize.

And a waterfall that hums through a turbine
And is whirled into light.

A river that carries many tongues in its mouth.

The "imagined political community" (Anderson, 1983:15) that the liberation organisations envisioned was entirely against the divisive logic of apartheid. Such conceptions of identity were necessarily *imagined* because the people involved "could not know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each live[d] the image of their communion" (1983:15). In the South African resistance the mystical aspect of Anderson's construct was supported by its material dimensions, as people across the country undertook a concerted challenge against the state with a vision of a transformed society as the goal. In the concluding stanza of Peter Horn's poem "The second elegy" (1991:83-4) the inchoate finds a voice:

In this silence I write, make comparisons, invent symbols
of that which I do not yet know.

and yet, the poem remains the voice of this living moment (1991:84).

COSATU's support for the UDF's position on sanctions led to obvious contradictions. Acknowledging that "no people would freely vote sanctions upon themselves," Alec Erwin[7] argued that COSATU's "acceptance of disinvestment was primarily part of its support for the general campaign to isolate the South African regime" (Baskin, 1991:154). The labour movement chose to contain its contradictions as part of its solidarity with the mass democratic movement, the exiled liberation movements and the position of the international community (through the United Nations, the Commonwealth and the Non-Aligned Movement). In 1987 COSATU formally aligned itself with the ANC and the UDF by adopting the Freedom Charter as its guiding document, in effect "singing one with the voice of time", as Serote wrote in *A Tough Tale* (1987:43).

One of the most important victories of the alliance was the two-day stayaway on 5 and 6 May 1987, when 2,5 million people protested against the 6 May election that PW Botha had called to obtain a mandate to further suppress the struggle for democracy. Murphy Morobe, the UDF publicity secretary, argued that the stayaway

> underscores the significance of our campaign for a national united action and the centrality of the UDF, COSATU and the entire democratic movement in any attempt at resolving the problems of South Africa (Baskin, 1991:190).

As a worker, named only as John, from the Cape Town branch of the Food and Allied Workers' Union, asserts in "It's You the People":

It's you, the people, that make
The unions strong (1989:118)

Few writers were schooled in their art. Few chose to become artists: often the pressure of events turned them into artists, as it turned them into activists. The examples of activists like

John and revolutionaries like Benjamin Moloise (who wrote a poem just before his execution in 1985) confirm Fanon's observation of how writers are produced by the liberation struggle:

> During this phase a great many men and women who up till then would never have thought of producing a literary work, now find themselves in exceptional circumstances - in prison... or on the eve of their execution - feel the need to speak to their nation, to compose the sentence which expresses the heart of the people, and to become the mouthpiece of a new reality in action (1963:223).

The contribution of the labour movement to the national stayaway demonstrated its significance in the contest over power: 1,5 million workers withheld their labour on those days, and COSATU's organisational network enabled effective national co-ordination. Peter Horn's poem "Canto Seven: One and Many" (1991:113-4) celebrates workers' recognition of the importance of organising as a class, as well as across class:

> You were all alone: before you learned
> that in this town of exploitation and misery
> you had brothers and sisters: fellow workers,
> who were alone too, and beaten and shot and driven
> from their shacks. Alone they learned,
> they could not lick this loneliness, and
> alone, they learned, they could not win this war
> against vigilantes, policemen, soldiers and bosses (1991:114).

As in case of Cronin and Gottschalk, Horn's activism implicitly manifests cross-class and cross-race solidarity in the liberation struggle. When these members of privileged minorities made common cause with the oppressed they did not do so to reinforce minority interests. Instead, a writer like Peter Horn uses difference productively to challenge the pervasive zones of exclusion that have characterised South African culture, as "The ninth elegy" (1991:98-9), which affirms silenced people, attests:

> [Those] who have been silent,
> afraid to say, what they knew was right, in the wrong way,
> because they had been told that their English was bad,
> and that they knew nothing. No longer prepared to shut up
> or to voertsek they open their trap and say what they've got to say.
> And they find that that is simple, and their inadequate English
> suffices: We want to be paid for our work. We want work.
> We are going to appoint the government to look after our interests.
> We want good schools for our children

Clearly Horn's racial and class privileges, and his verbal facility in English (his second language) do not undermine his advocacy of the struggles of ordinary people, but drive him to deal with the inequities.

Resistance writers have had to work through complex social relations to locate spaces and forums to enunciate, sustain and authorise oppressed voices. English is in the process of

becoming a South African language, and the resistance writers have done much to democratise that process, battling along the way against serious contradictions such as the issue of access. English has been a *lingua franca* of the struggle which has boosted its significance. At the same time the intimate involvement of the English language in the struggle had an enormous impact on its own development as a South African language. Watts refers to the resistance writers' participation in the creation of a flexible and expressive literary language that is close to the ordinary speech of people (1989:252). The work of writers like Gwala, Van Wyk and Mhlope show how the language begins to take its place as a South African language, even as writers like Serote express serious reservations in their poetry about the kinds of violence that the language does to the subjectivity of an oppressed person. None of this forecloses on the language questions that the post-apartheid society has to address along with other questions of redress, for as Phaswane Mpe argues, "as long as most of 'the people' cannot read and understand English, there is no way it can ever be their language" (1992:30).

On 24 February 1988 COSATU was prohibited from engaging in any political activity. A few days later, on 28 February 1988, the UDF was effectively banned. By the end of 1988, 18 progressive organisations had been effectively banned (Wilson and Ramphele, 1989:226-7) and about 200 leaders and key activists had spent 30 months in prison (Webster and Friedman, 1989:18-19). The state had to content itself with restricting COSATU (and not banning it outright), for it was clear that the organisation was too strong to be destroyed merely by edict. COSATU responded to the restrictions placed upon it in terms that express a broad commitment to social justice:

> the state is attempting to restrict COSATU to what they see as legitimate trade union functions. We reject this because there is no democracy in South Africa, and COSATU and other organisations are part of the extra-parliamentary opposition that are legitimately putting forward the demands and interests of our members both on the shopfloor and in the broader society (Baskin, 1991:269).

The unions coped better with the repression because of their location within the production process: management was dependent on the unions to negotiate with the workers (Pillay, 1996:333). It was much easier for the state to ban the political and community organisations than the trade unions, which are integral to industrial relations. Thus, contrary to Hlatshwayo's poem "The Black Mamba Rises" (1986:29-33), it was not the case of "The black mamba that shelters in the songs" (1986:30), although the UDF was obliged to do so.

COSATU's conception of its responsibilities as a trade union federation in the broad political struggle was unequivocal. Two massive stay-aways in March and June 1988 were illegal under the Emergency regulations and the restrictions of February 1988 (which barred COSATU from political activities). COSATU could not make any public calls for a stay-away, neither could it be involved in any of the organising. Despite this the three-day stay-away in June was the biggest mass demonstration at the time. It showed that despite the government's repression, opposition to its policies remained intense (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:137).

The cultural work of the UDF was able to proceed relatively unscathed, as Gillian Slovo points out:

> Because of the small-scale and often regional nature of cultural activity, the regime has encountered difficulties in stemming the flow of cultural works and activities of the mass democratic movement (Corrigall, 1990:55).

This was as the unions and UDF structures had anticipated, and further justified the investment of resources in cultural work. Under the cloak of cultural activity the struggle progressed. Some of the success of the Defiance Campaigns that followed was attributable to the organising that occurred in the name of cultural work.

In anticipation of the silencing of dissent, activists had mobilised international support for the liberation struggle for years. Some of the mobilisation was linked to sports, cultural, educational, economic and diplomatic boycotts. The political exiles played important roles in instigating and maintaining international solidarity. The poet and academic, Dennis Brutus, who founded the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee, was a consistent source of opposition to the apartheid government. The African bloc of nations pressurised the organisers of international sporting events into excluding South Africa by threatening to withdraw. The sports boycott against the regime began at the Mexico City Olympic games in 1968.

The success of the international campaign for sanctions and disinvestment had much to do with the international support that the trade union federations, and the religious, cultural and political organisations had developed. The meaning of the word "international" came to have a different, more empowering meaning (from the self-aggrandizing meaning it has in conservative-liberal discourse) through the solidarity that was established.

There were strong declarations of support for the struggle from the United Nations. In 1975 the United Nations General Assembly had passed a resolution that declared the regime in South Africa "illegitimate" with "no right to represent the people of South Africa" (Asmal, Asmal and Roberts, 1996:184). The General Assembly at the same time reaffirmed "the legitimacy of the struggle of the oppressed people of South Africa and their liberation movements, by all possible means, for the seizure of power by the people and the exercise of their inalienable right to self-determination" (1996:184). In 1983 the United Nations called on "all South Africans to resist, by all means, the imposition of the new constitution" (1996:184). By 1985 "international opinion against apartheid reached new heights, leading to an increase in political and economic pressure from abroad and greater support for the anti-apartheid struggle" (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:132). At the launch of the UDF in 1983, before an audience of fourteen thousand people, Mzwakhe Mbuli performed his poem "I am the voice of international anger".[8]

The struggle in South Africa resonated with other local struggles elsewhere in the world, and the support of other oppressed people and organisations was important to the struggle for state power. In countries that have suffered imperialist domination, nationalism is an important moment in the development of autonomy (imperialism has to be contested along national boundaries). Resistance poets drew on the developments in other countries to sustain the struggle in South African. As in the case of Mafika Gwala's tribute to Vietnam in "Vo

Nguyen Giap (1984:), Bafana Buthelezi celebrates the popular victories of small countries who succeeded in repelling imperialist forces in "Tribute to Mapetha" (Ndaba, 1986:76-7):

> in Vietnam and Cuba
> while the guns roared the days were grim
> but their day dawned
> the gun was powerful
> yet the people were more powerful.

Dikobe wa Mogale locates the complex challenges of the South African liberation movement in the context of the violations of power that occur across the world in "bantwini ngcipe's testament" (1984:46-49). Beginning with Latin America the poem ranges through the Middle East to the Pacific and Asia:

> i come from the Pacific where our home is being
> turned into
> a dumping ground for nuclear wastes
> I come from Asia where the violation of human rights
> and dignity
> continues unabated due to militarisation
> supported by the so-called superpowers

Wa Mogale points out that the immediate material interests of developed countries in Europe are not exempt from the machinations of military-industrial complexes:

> i come from the backyards of Europe where the
> deployment of nuclear
> arms and militarisation brings us daily closer to
> Armageddon

Eventually the poem focuses on Africa:

> i come from Afrika,
> with the wounds of colonialism, neo-colonialism
> and imperialism

Wa Mogale's integrative approach challenges the invidious "universality" of neocolonial culture.

Given the absence of unified national literary traditions in societies whose borders had been demarcated by colonialists (Watts, 1989:8), as various Southern African countries gained independence they adapted the anthem "*Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika*" for their national anthems. There is "*Nkosi Sikelel' iTanzania*" in Kiswahili; the Zambian anthem, "Zambia Proud and Free" which takes the tune of "Nkosi Sikelel'iAfrika"; "*Nkosi Sikelel'iZimbabwe*" in Shona and Ndebele; and the Namibian anthem, "*Nkosi Sikelel'iNamibia*"[9]. The adoption of the song in the neighbouring states reflects the popular solidarity that existed between oppressed people in South Africa and the neighbouring states (Mutloatse, 1987:153-165). As a result of their own histories of struggle for liberation the six "frontline states" of Angola,

Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana and Tanzania were supportive of the liberation movements in South Africa. The racism and the destabilization tactics of the South African regime made them more determined to support the resistance as best they could (Turok, 1990:9). From Thomas Mapfumo (Zimbabwe), Maina wa Kinyatti and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Kenya), to the Frelimo[10] artists and the MPLA[11] writers, the literary engagement with anti-imperialist struggles was particularly inspirational, as is clarified in Karin Barber's account of cross-class solidarity around national goals:

> intellectual activists and peasants have joined forces and produced radical art from a common struggle. It has happened in Eastern Africa. The Mau Mau songs from Kenya, the Chimurenga songs from Zimbabwe, and the songs and poetry from Mozambique were all produced at the instigation of highly conscious cadres seeking to mobilize the ordinary people; but as the people became engaged in the same struggle, they took over the songs and made them part of their own repertoire. The songs ... furthered the interests of the people (national liberation) and belonged to the people (who performed and listened to them) (1987:7-8).

Answering expressions of solidarity with the struggles in the neighbouring states are expressed in several poems by Dikobe wa Mogale. In "azania" (1984:18) and "chimurenga wind" (1984:23) Wa Mogale celebrates the liberation of oppressed people from other countries in Southern Africa. Such poems suggest the need for people to connect the local, the national, the regional and the global, and to challenge the old limits of geography and nationality. As independent Zimbabwe drew the roots of its anthem from the anthem of the South African resistance, the South African rebellion was fuelled by the energetic *toyi-toyi* that had been picked up by exiles training in guerilla tactics in Zimbabwe.

Notes:

1. These audiences would include sympathetic minorities, foreign readers, and so on. By dismissing "the people", who by 1984 were prominently engaged in challenging the state, Chapman seems to be engaging in the standard conservative liberal denial of this audience.

2. The road is an image that Serote has often used to depict the course of the long struggle for liberation, eg., in *No Baby Must Weep* (1975).

3. The state did not allow this residential anomaly of apartheid to exist for much longer.

4. The song was composed in 1897 by the Reverend Enoch Sontonga of the Johannesburg township of Nancefield (later Klipspruit), and first sung in 1899. Subsequent stanzas were added by the poet S.E.K Mqhayi. There was also a seSotho version by Moses Mphahlele. Popularised by the Ohlange School choir in Durban, the piece was performed at the inaugural meeting of the South African Native National Congress (as the ANC was initially known) in 1912, and formally adopted by the African National Congress as its closing anthem in 1925 (Mutloatse, 1987:153-160; *Sunday Times* 31.10.93). The patriarchal, middle class history of the song, as well as its dependency on the colonial anthem ("God save the Queen") is apparent to most people who sing it, but this does not seem to have done much harm to its popularity among feminists, communists or nationalists.

5. Ramaphosa was the National Union of Mineworkers' lawyer.

6. The *Indaba* plan eventually collapsed.

7. Erwin, who had been an academic, initially served as the general secretary of FOSATU, and was COSATU's education secretary at the time of this statement. Later, he served as NUMSA's national education officer, and then (unofficially) as COSATU's chief economist (Baskin, 1991:26, 154, 243-4, 443). He is currently the Minister of Trade and Development.

8. It is likely that this title, as reported in the media at the time, refers to Mbuli's poem "The Voice of Anger" (1989:46-7), which has the line "This is the international voice of anger".

9. COSATU assisted the South West African People's Organisation in the Namibian elections.

10. The Front for the Liberation of Mozambique.

11. The Movement for the Liberation of Angola.

Chapter Eight: Culture and media: censorship and resistance

8.1 The censorship of culture

> just tell me
> how do I sing
> with a boot on my throat
> (Peter Horn, 1991:30)

The political censorship of literature and the media is integral to an understanding of the nature of resistance literature. Censorship refers to the official restrictions on ideas, which often involve prosecution or suppression, either before or following publication. The South African state's imposition of legislation curbing the freedom of expression was part of its political and cultural offensive on dissidence. The government established agencies and instruments to set out, police, measure and punish the crimes, heresies and treasons of expression which it believed endangered its existence.

By the end of the 1960s the National Party government had suppressed a generation of writers and other dissidents. Writers were prevented from publishing, reading, reproducing, printing or disseminating of any speech, utterance, writing or statement. The principal instrument by which the government censored literature was the Publications and Entertainments Act of 1963. There were 97 definitions of what was officially undesirable in literature, ie., subversive, obscene, or otherwise "offensive" (Gordimer, 1973:52). Related censorship laws further prohibited the possession or reading of such material.

Dennis Brutus, Bloke Modisane and Alex la Guma were the first group of writers to be banned under the Suppression of Communism Act. The amendment in 1966 to the Suppression of Communism Act led to the suppression of forty-six writers. Exiles like Todd Matshikiza, Mazisi Kunene, Es'kia Mphahlele, Lewis Nkosi, Cosmo Pieterse, and Can Themba were listed under the Suppression of Communism Act. The state's conception of the term "communist" had little to do with the affiliation of a writer, but was a crude attempt to silence dissident expression. In 1966, by banning every publication and statement by black writers in exile under the Suppression of Communism Act the state seemed to be trying to make South African literature and culture white by law.

The tendency of black writers to adopt the verse form at this stage was not surprising. There are diverse reasons for the revival of poetry:

> Experience had taught the blacks that prose was a dangerous instrument because too explicit. The government tolerated poetry more readily because it reached a smaller audience. But the poem is also a hiding place,

> and a marvelous short-cut to saying what is essential with great economy because it expresses the immediacy of emotion in a concentrated form.
>
> Even more than the short story had done previously, poetry was able to reflect the troubled and hectic life of the majority of working blacks... with its constant insecurity and its lack of leisure, and of the students on the volatile university campuses (Alvarez-Pereyre, 1984:38).

The repression continued in the 1970s. *Cry Rage!* (1972), an anthology by James Matthews and Gladys Thomas, was "the first book of poems ever to be banned within South Africa" (Gordimer, 1973:70), and remained banned at the end of the 1980s. Other work by Matthews was also banned: a poetry collection that he edited, *Black Voices Shout* (1974), and his own anthology of poems, *Pass me a meatball, Jones* (1976). Books by Mothobi Mutloatse, Mtutuzeli Matshoba, Miriam Tlali, Oswald Mtshali, Sipho Sepamla and Ingoapele Madingoane were banned, while three of Gordimer's books were banned. Serote's second collection *Tsetlo* was published and banned in 1974. The first edition (1974) of the anthology *Poets to the People,* which represented the work of exiled poets in the main, was banned a year after it had been published in Britain (Feinberg, 1980:xii). Don Mattera was banned from publishing anything. Confronting his censors at the Limits of Liberty Festival in 1993 Mattera accused them of being directly responsible for some 350 raids on his house and for being behind some 150 detentions (*Weekly Mail*, 30.7.93:6). Peter Horn's poem "Silence in jail" (1991:62-3) draws on Wally Serote's image of the country as a massive jail:

> They don't like music in prison
> so they banned Dennis Brutus's poems
> and Wopko Jensma's poems
> and Breyten Breytenbach's poems
> and James Matthews' poems
> and my own poems

"Silence in Jail" had originally appeared in *Staffrider* 2.1 (1979), and was one of the reasons the censors gave for banning the edition for distribution.[1] As Horn later argued, the state was prepared to use all means to prevent any development towards a new ethos:

> whatever was said had to be said under conditions of heavy repression and censorship, of a state banning poetry (volume after volume) and leaders of the people, killing, mutilating, burning, using all the means at its disposal to make the production of new insights impossible (1994:59-60).

Texts that were thought to be subversive were banned and writers were banned or otherwise harassed. Well before the appearance of his first collection, *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum* in 1971, Oswald Mtshali had already experienced the wrath of the state: his home was raided in 1968 by the security police, who were suspicious of his poetry (Chapman, 1982:99-103). Essop Patel's poem "They Came at Dawn" (1980:31) depicts the behaviour of the security police:

they came
rapping thunder
on the door,
asking
questions,
demanding
answers.

They came at dawn
they left at dusk
taking a poem
written
on a bronze autumn leaf,
written
in the shadow of bars,
as evidence
for a banning order.

These lines suggest that at this point the state took poetry quite seriously. They also suggest differences in the way the state and the conservative liberal academic establishment viewed literature: while most of the latter considered most resistance literature too inept to be of any significance, the state tended to believe that the literature threatened the status quo.

Sipho Sepamla and Athol Fugard were refused passports. Wally Serote's education was interrupted when he was detained under the Terrorism Act in 1972. Serote was held for nine months in solitary confinement, and he was released without being charged. In "Masochism" (Feinberg, 1980:129) Victor Matlou (Zinjiva Nkondo) examines the cost of freedom of expression in South Africa:

words...
powerful and rhetorical
have wasted our black lips
sending us down dusty cells
creating many a wasted martyr

But the young Serote would not be silenced: *Yakhal'inkomo* (1972) was published soon after his release. Molefe Phetoe, Mafika Gwala and James Matthews were also detained, Gwala for three months under the Terrorism Act (in 1977) and Matthews for six months under the Internal Security Act (Gwala, 1984:44-5). Literary organisations such as Medupe were banned. Andries Oliphant and Duma Ndlovu were raided. Lefifi Tladi, Duma Ndlovu, Wally Serote and Molefe Phetoe were eventually driven into exile. In "When Lights Go Out" (1982b:69) Serote describes the situation according to the ruling fantasy:

now
silence strides across the sky

Oswald Mtshali's second collection, *Fireflames* (1980), was banned under the Publications Act as being prejudicial to the safety of the state, the general welfare or peace and good order. Mtshali clarifies the dilemma of many committed writers of the time:

> our feelings as black people have become more and more vocal. For too long we have been muffled by our unfounded fears which we cannot contain anymore. Of course there have been real fears of being lynched, murdered, and imprisoned if we dared to raise our voices to what we knew for a long time to be wrong and expected to be righted (Chapman, 1982:106).

There are many descriptions of the pervasive repression in the literature of the 1970s and the early 1980s. In "Behold Mama, Flowers!" (1978:11-61) Serote uses a loosely structured, sprawling poem to tell, among other things, of the painful attempts to resist the apartheid regime:

> we were made to sing songs and be laughed at
> we were made to weep and be laughed at (1978:59)

Earlier in the poem Serote examines the consequences for those who dared to think and act independently:

> when we began to talk
> when we began to think
> when we began to ask
> we were left with our tongues hanging out (1978:17)

Sipho Sepamla addressed the consequences of repression for all South Africans in a 1976 article. He cited Nadine Gordimer's statement that

> a whole generation of South Africans is growing up with areas of the world of ideas closed to them, and without any insight into the lives and aspirations of their fellow countrymen (Chapman, 1982:115).

Reinforcing the point, Sepamla declares: "I would have liked to have been fed on Mphahlele, La Guma, Themba, Nkosi" (1982:116). All had been silenced by the Suppression of Communism Act. Miriam Tlali has stated that the absence of any dialogue with her immediate predecessors and contemporaries made her development as a writer more difficult (Chapman, 1982:45). The isolation of the resistance writers was exacerbated by the absence of the support and feedback of a literary community.

The impact of censorship was compounded by the effects of the Bantu Education Act (1953). The act was one of the principal instruments of social and cultural decimation, representing a policy of underdevelopment that contributed to the silencing of dissent. Most resistance poets of the 1970s show recognition of the links between the various forms of repression, especially as many of them were among the early recipients of Bantu education. Tlali points out that the absence of local literature was not only the result of the extensive suppression of writers and books, but was related to the fact that black people

were barred from good public libraries and had access only to very poor facilities (Chapman, 1982:44-45).

The silencing was extensive and brutal, as Serote's "Behold Mama, Flowers" clarifies in the words "humanity has never meant me" (1978:58). Nobody seemed to be safe from reprisals, as Sipho Sepamla suggests in "On Fear" (1984:93-4):

> for days
> we were run on fear...
> from lips brutalised by abuse
> we heard of searing screams

Along with novels, poems, essays and little magazines as the main target of censorship. "Alternative" drama was also subject to state control. The Performing Arts Councils in each province were controlled through state funding and managed by conservative all-white municipalities. Beginning with the segregation of audiences,

> theatre has always been threatened by the state, and by the powerful and enduring hegemonic processes that work for selective awareness of South African history and the South African present (Orkin, 1991:17).

Given the levels of literacy and the state control of the electronic media, few oppressed people had access to information about developments in the resistance. Drama served to convey some of the voices of resistance, but "alternative" drama and dramatists were particularly vulnerable because of the performative nature of the medium. Prior to the Soweto uprising in 1976 the New Brighton playwright Rev. Mzwandile Maqina was banned because his plays *Give us this day* (which was inspired by the parcel-bomb assassination of the exiled student leader, Onkgopotse Abraham Tiro) and *The Trial* were thought to be inflamatory.

In 1983 a South African exile in Amsterdam, Anthony Akerman, wrote a play *Somewhere on the Border*, about the brutalising effects of conscription under apartheid. He posted a copy to Athol Fugard, who never received it. Three months later the unpublished play was mysteriously banned. The government gazette said Akerman's play was "offensive" and dangerous to the safety of the state" (*The Weekend Mail* supplement to *Weekly Mail*, 31.9.90). However, although it was banned for publication it was, curiously, not banned for performance, and *Somewhere on the Border* was a success at the Grahamstown Festival in 1986.

Given the state's response to playscripts it is not surprising that self-censorship in some published plays was deemed a necessary evil: "much that might have been said or enacted in performance is eliminated from the written page version" (Orkin, 1991:16-17).

Plays linked to education were treated more severely by the censors. In 1984 Don Mattera's poster play *One Time Brother* (1985:31-33), a project of the racially-integrated Open School Street and Community Theatre Programme, was banned. On the whole, however, plays were restricted rather than being banned outright. Given the complicated

political situation and the confusing nature of the actions of the state censors, Nadine Gordimer concluded that

> on the evidence of what is banned week after week now, within this part of the year, 1983 and into 1984 - they have decided, that literature is more or less irrelevant in the struggle. What is being banned are pamphlets and tracts. It is not only white sophisticated literature that is being left unbanned, it is also quite a lot of black literature (Welz, 1987:37-45).

On the other hand, the veteran journalist Joseph Lelyveld decided that there was little to be read into the state's actions:

> The capriciousness of a system that can ban a mug and release a poem, torture one activist and seem to ignore another, keeps its enemies constantly off-balance while enticing potential collaborators, both at home and abroad (1987:33).

Ian Steadman believed that the state was trying to create the impression of reform:

> Perhaps the state has begun to realise that in the heightened tensions of South African society, the safety valve provided by cultural expression is becoming extremely important. In the context of the governmental gesture of "reform", the theatre has been less exposed to the formal machinery of the Publications Act. Instead, more insidious forms of control are being invoked. In a crisis-ridden society, state censorship provokes embarrassing media attention (1985:28).

At the same time practitioners of resistance drama encountered great problems with township performances. Scripts had to be submitted to township authorities before performances, and few were permitted to go on. Those that were allowed were often subject to expurgation. There were more perilous situations as well. Responding to criticism that his later work was "directed too narrowly at whites" Mbongeni Ngema described the hazards of staging of *Asinamali* (1985) in Mpumalanga township:

> there is now a tremendous threat from vigilantes and the police. For example, when we took *Asinamali* to Hammarsdale in Natal, right-wing vigilantes arrived in fleets of cars and blockaded the theatre. They asked for me but I was not there that night. They beat up people at random and hacked the producer to death (*Weekly Mail*, 13.2.87:21).

Maishe Maponya wrote and directed the play *Umongikazi/The Nurse* (1995), which ran for three weeks in 1983. However, when Maponya's Bahumutsi Drama Group performed the play at Baragwanath Hospital,

> the security branch called at my home and left a note telling me to report to Protea police station the next morning at eight o' clock with the script of the play and my passport (1995:ix).

Maponya's experience with the censors over his double-bill, *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters* (1995), clarifies the logic of the state. *Gangsters* depicts how a woman poet being held in detention is tortured to death by security police. The double-bill had a successful season at the Market Theatre in downtown Johannesburg. When Maponya announced that he wanted to produce the plays in Soweto, he was notified by the censors that while they could continue at The Market Theatre, he was forbidden to present the more militant play, *Gangsters,* in the townships:

> When *Gangsters* was restricted by the Publications Control Board to "small, intimate avant-garde" theatres, it automatically meant that the play could not be seen by the majority of black audiences in the townships [because] there were no such theatres (Maponya, 1995:xi).

Ian Steadman, who has worked closely with Maponya, raises questions about the anomaly:

> Why, with its reputation for repressive state and ideological apparatus, has the South African government apparently ignored the recent spate of politically-inspired theatre played in established theatres and on the international stage? Why, on the other hand, have pressures been brought to bear on the home front - in the townships and in alternative theatre venues - against plays embracing even mild political content? (1985:26).[2]

Matsamela Manaka, whose play *Egoli* (no date, possibly 1981) was banned, explains the reasons the government was not as concerned with urban performances of the plays but had serious concerns with township performances:

> Critical plays in town are okay because the audience in town is not a revolutionary mass. The township audience is, and they can be influenced by your ideas because it affects them directly (Hollyer and Luther, 1985:30).

This ties in with the questions of audience, agency and commitment to change that were raised in the third chapter on the conservative liberals. The location of venue suggests the substantive differences between the ideology, material interests and responses of middle class, white minority audiences and black, working and intermediate class township audiences.

At the same time state censorship of the media escalated, suggesting that the government was more concerned about the dissemination of factual information. Andre Brink warned (referring obliquely to the hegemonic influence of the conservative liberals) that,

> If the artist has come to be regarded as irrelevant by the authorities, perhaps it is because he has misinterpreted the full extent of his function within this society (Chapman, 1988:33).

The responses of a range of activist-poets to the liberal preference for poems about the natural beauty of the country instead of the socio-political situation is one way of

addressing Brink's challenge. In "It is said" (Ndaba, 1986:19) James Matthews rebuts the liberal prescription:

> It is said
> that poets write of beauty
> of form, of flowers and of love
> but the words I write
> are of pain and rage

Mzwakhe Mbuli suggests in "Crocodiles" (1989:39-40) that an unremitting focus on suffering and struggle is difficult but there is no alternative for the poet in such a society:

> How hard and tormenting it is
> To write about slavery and not freedom
> How hard and tormenting it is
> To write about pain and not joy
> When shall I write about daffodils
> How can I write about the beauty of nature?
> When the ground is daily soaked
> With the blood of the innocent

COSATU's cultural organiser, the oral poet Mi Hlatshwayo, dismissed the demands of the liberal critics as absurd: "You cannot deprive or take away a person's land and at the same time expect him to draw and sing about the landscape" (*Weekly Mail*, 3.6.88:21). As Matthews argues in "It is said" (Ndaba, 1986:19), black people have endured a very traumatic relationship with the land, as victims of the original wave of settler confiscations through to the 1913 Land Act and, more recently, the National Party's legislation regarding influx control, "black spots", homelands, and the Group Areas Act:

> I wail of a land
> hideous with open graves
> waiting for the slaughtered ones

Suggesting that the people of this country have a history of consideration for the natural environment, and that liberal admonitions represent arrogance and misapprehension, Peter Horn insists in "The ninth elegy" (1991:98-9) on focusing on the liberation struggle, although

> Later again we will talk about trees
> and birds.

Horn refused to be blinded by the privileges of his class, race and profession. In "Canto Four: Security Forces" (1991:108) Horn's speaker uses irony to challenge the government's abuse of the country's resources to defend the interests of a tiny minority, and declares allegiance with those constructed as enemies. The irony also shows how the speaker contradicts the state's construction of its beneficiaries and its enemies:

> They see to it that I can sleep well:

disturbed only occasionally
by exploding cars and police stations,
attacks on the army headquarters,
and the homes of traitors.

They use my money well:
helicopters circle above me,
computers follow every step I make,
caspirs rumble through the streets I walk...

They use my money well
against me:
tracing connecting lines on electronic boards,
constructing reactors for the ultimate weapon,
mixing poisonous gases,
training secret psychologists
to tear the thought from my brain cells,
building cold cement structures
to hold my rebellious body,
building gallows
to hang me.

They use my money well
against me:
the enemy.

Horn, like Serote and Cronin, has done much towards bridging the gap between high and popular forms.

In her revolutionary's riposte to the liberals who were in denial while benefitting from a highly militarized society, Sankie Nkondo's "Voices From the Trench" (1990:14-17) asserts the persistence of a foot-soldier:

I do not have the leisure
to wander along aimless paths
to wallow in literary art creations
I have not been blessed with the time
to ponder over the words of language...
I am a mere soldier-poet

David Bunn and Jane Taylor argue that the P.W. Botha regime had relaxed censorship in the mid-1980s because they saw intellectuals as an "ineffectual class who could be allowed their liberal catharsis" (1987:21). However, not long after the censors under Kobus van Rooyen began to operate in a more "reformist" mode the state became alarmed by the growing popular response to drama:

> Over the past few years, however, the audience for political writing has broadened considerably and government censors have reacted.... Failing to

> stem the revolutionary fervor or activism [the state] has fallen back on an attempt to control the means of representation, which is enforced through the catch-all definition of "subversive statements" in the emergency regulations (1987:21).

The operation of different layers and modes of censorhip is borne out by the attack by the Minister of Home Affairs, Stoffel Botha, on resistance art. Unlike Van Rooyen, Stoffel Botha had decided views about the political effects of art and culture in South Africa, as he indicated in a statement to the house of Representatives:

> After certain theatrical performances the audience is so emotionally charged that they will not calm down before everything in the vicinity, from buildings to cars and even other people have been attacked (*Weekly Mail*, 3.6.88:21).

Adrian Hadland, an arts journalist, responded with the following criticisms of Botha's argument:

> The claim is extreme. Although the vision of marauding bands of Market Theatre patrons may be cause for mirth, the minister's pronouncement is indicative of a new and ominous level of government concern about the subversive power of the arts (1988:21).

Clearly the government's concerns were linked to the remarkable growth of organised cultural initiatives within extra-parliamentary groups. Challenged to defend his statement, Stoffel Botha offered the following response, which confirms Hadland's assessment:

> What I expressed concern about were plays... staged in theatres in the main cities of the Republic focusing on themes of alleged oppression and police brutality, consciption, alleged social and political injustices and the like. Can the aims and purposes of such plays be anything else than creating a spirit of discontent, unrest, civil disobedience, insurrection and in the final instance, revolution? (1988:21).

Stoffel Botha conceded that it was difficult for the performers of plays, recitals or popular music to control the responses of the audience, although he warned that "censorship remained an under-utilised weapon in the state's armoury" (1988:21). In response Chris Pretorius, director of the (initially banned, then restricted) play *Sunrise City* argued that

> challenging accepted norms is exactly what theatre is all about. A government that can't stand up to criticism shouldn't be there in the first place (1988:21).

In a move that compounded the pressure on the arts, F.W. de Klerk, then Minister of Education, warned at a state sponsored arts conference in Stellenbosch in 1988 against "the threat of 'people's art' and the role of groups that propagated it in the 'total onslaught'" (1988:21). While the state seemed determined to crush all manifestations of resistance, it

was clear that this would not happen without a struggle. A person identified by Hadland only as a United Democratic Front member retorted:

> You can't ban culture. You can suppress it or at least try to replace it... but it will always be there. And if it's always there, then it can be used (1988:21).

It is also interesting that Stoffel Botha's remarks (in 1988) about audiences running amok after certain productions were quite unfounded: Gillian Slovo points out that "[t]here were no reports of this in fact happening during three years of emergency rule" (Corrigall, 1990:56). Slovo's research also contradicts the Directorate of Publications' reason for banning the Nyanga Theatre Players' production *Kwanele* (Enough) in 1987, for allegedly "giving rise to new violence, rioting and terrorism" (*New Nation*, 17.3.88:10). What was happening was the ongoing repression of drama. The emergency regulations were used in combination with prior legislation to restrict cultural activity. The new regulations enabled the state to react quickly to stop performances.

In a section of "Baphomet's dance on my eardrum" (1991:20-1) Peter Horn challenges the state's representatives, whom he portrays as cowardly bullies behaving like the German fascists of Brecht's accusation:

> Why are you so frightened?
> You *are* the same who courageously
> babble against the liberals, atheists and communists
> You *are* the same still who courageously
> shot down unarmed women and children.
> Yet: you are afraid of our poems: a mere breath.
> the army trembles
> when we enter a classroom. Hysteria
> ripples through the width of the country
> over an unorthodox opinion.

Given Stoffel Botha and F.W. de Klerk's responses, Horn's satire does not seem too excessive. The ministers' remarks would have given the security police further licence to harass politically committed writers and performers.

8.2 Challenging censorship and other forms of cultural repression

> The challenge is to free the entire social imagination of the oppressed (Ndebele, 1988:211).

The resistance to censorship and other forms of cultural repression ranged from writing to community action and political intervention. Since the power of any system depends upon an acceptance of the rulers' conception of the world, to construct new social relations cultural workers had to challenge the politically and socially instituted limits:

> the greatest challenge of the South African revolution is in the search for ways of thinking, ways of perception, that will help to break down the closed epistemological structures of South African oppression.... The challenge is to free the entire social imagination of the oppressed from the laws of perception that have characterised apartheid society (Ndebele, 1988:211).

Many poems suggest the development of hope and confidence, despite the onslaught of the apartheid regime. Serote's "Hell, Well, Heaven" (1972:24-25) draws on the bold declarative style of the civil rights movement in the United States to chart the beginnings of a sense of mission:

> I do not know where I have been
> But Brother,
> I know I'm coming
> I do not know where I have been
> But Brother,
> I know I heard the call

The title suggests the transformative power inherent in the attitudes of ordinary people. It points out that transformation begins as an act of will. The poem signals the beginning of a concerted effort against the psychological and physical debilitation of apartheid:

> I do not know where I have been
> To have despair so deep and deep and deep
> But Brother,
> I know I'm coming.

That the response of the speaker to the call for political mobilisation turns out to be a rallying call in itself, demonstrating the sequential effect of popular-democratic culture.

Among the early literary responses to the political situation is Keorapetse Kgositsile's "A Luta Continua" (Finn and Gray, 1992:75-6), a requiem for Duma Nokwe (the ANC secretary-general in the 1950s and 1960s). This takes the form of a challenge to the state.

If the warped bloodhounds of tyranny say
They will torture and kill us
Let them. Let them
Skulls they will crack, yes
Young bones they will trample underfoot, yes
School and church will also try
To twist and break our young yearning minds, yes
But the unbridled brutality of these beasts
Shall not break us. We are not twigs
Your love for humanity and peace
Strengthens us.

Refusing to be dispirited by the practices of the state, the poet chooses instead to focus on the inspirational power of Nokwe's life.

> Aggression was met not by closing oneself in, or armouring oneself, but by exposing one's vulnerability, by making visible what the dominating power excludes or denies. This turns what are supposed to be signs of weakness into symbols of strength (Brett, 1986:149).

A similar strategy is apparent in Benjamin Moloise's "Poem written on death row" (Ndaba, 1986:123), which conveys the resolve of a freedom fighter to counter the function of the apartheid hangings. Written just before he was hanged, Moloise's words represent a very powerful kind of "singing for our execution" that challenged the power of the state to liquidate resistance.

I am proud to be what I am,
The storm of oppression will be followed
By the rain of my blood.
I am proud to give my life,
My one solitary life.

Brett's insights clarify the humility and openness of Mafika Gwala's poem "There Is..." (1978:31):

Undeniably there is
There is a truth
with rings wider than a poet's eye

There is faith despite the horror of experience:

There is, with all the odds against
a will to watch a child grow
Even if it is in a littered street
Or in a shack where the rain pours
as water through a sieve...

There is a hope

> fanned by endless zeal
> decisive against the spectre of Sharpeville
> hardened by the tears of Soweto

The conclusion echoes the vulnerability raised in the opening stanza in a neat paradox which denies the fascist practices of apartheid:

> For there to be facts "other than"
> is our human asset.

The poem expresses the open-endedness and tolerance that has been key to the development of a popular-democratic culture in an oppressed society.

Oswald Mtshali expressed his sense of mission as a writer in 1976: "I write to liberate my people" (Alvarez-Pereyre, 1984:242). Such an attitude is evident in Serote's discussion of the challenges he faced when he began writing: "I could not ignore the fact that the interests of the oppressed are defined in terms of imprisonment, boycotts and strikes" (Chapman, 1982:113). Later in the interview, when Chapman asks "What direction do you see the black South African poet taking in the 1980s?" Serote's rejoinder clarifies his orientation: "What direction does the liberation struggle take in the 1980s? That is the direction of the black South African poet" (1982:115). Openly acknowledging poetry as a site of power relations (unlike the conservative liberals, who used it covertly) the resistance poets were determined that it was not going to be exempt from the struggle. Given the restrictions on free expression, literature offered an important space for the articulation of voices of resistance. Owing to its distance from power in western culture and its allusive language the genre of poetry enabled the resistance poets to dodge the systematic silencing better than other modes.

Beginning with the assumption that transformation was possible, the artists concentrated on what was most concrete in a society with few available resources, and began to focus on the experiences of their people:

> what Mtshali, Serote, Mattera, Matthews, Gwala and Sepamla write seems more utilitarian, more community-oriented than personal, more "local" than universal (Alvarez-Pereyre, 1984:242).

Serote represents this challenge well in "What's in this black shit?" (1972:16). The poem does not just react to the repressive discourses of the state or conservative liberal academia, but seriously considers what may be salvaged from the constructs of oppression and recycled to serve the culture of liberation.

Across the world resistance has usually started with a local focus, which tends to place the work of the resistance writers at odds with the conservative liberal preference for artistic distance. Insistence on the local in South African resistance writing was strengthened by the need to deal with the pass laws, the influx control legislation, and the restrictions on freedom of speech, which alienated people from their own lives. As part of their rejection of the policies of alienation, resistance writers sought to develop a distinctly South African discourse in which they could address their challenges, rather than submit to their location

on the *outside* or on the margins of the literary and critical discourses of the dominant. This is exemplified in Serote's poem "The sun was falling" (1982a:22):

> we shall sing a song
> a song
> which transforms
> the misery of the millions
> the millions who starved
> a song
> remember...
> a song
> in life and action
> breaking the night and building a day
> when we will live free
> to work and build our land

From the late 1970s Serote's poetry begins to focus on the ordinary and the everyday, a significant ideological and aesthetic development that parallels the resistance that was emerging. As is characteristic of popular art, the poems tend to be provisional, makeshift, contingent and experimental as they attempt to develop unity, articulate opposition, build self-confidence, and coordinate collective responses. A poem which addresses the desire and determination of oppressed South Africans to overcome the routine constraints is *A Tough Tale* (1987:36-7), in which the speaker recalls

> how as children our parents bought birth certificates and names for us
> house numbers and school passages for us.
> how they looked us in the eye
> warning
> the future has been empty for us
> let what limb or bone crack or break
> but the future for you must be different, *must* be better

Serote's poem "The Breezing Dawn of the New Day" (1982b:140) also uses the image of a child to symbolise fresh beginnings, despite the ongoing decimation:

> we sing here for we can sing still, about our national life
> a life
> which must grow now,
> like a child
> a child looked after and taught well
> that is our future

Literature played an important role as inspirational myth, rallying and enunciating the will to resistance, as rendered in the circular nature of the conclusion to *A Tough Tale*: "for our future is a poem which says so" (1987:39).

While the nightmares stemming from the suffering are recounted in Serote's *Behold Mama, Flowers* (1978:49), the rising determination to deal with the situation is foregrounded:

> how can i rest
> when the depths of the sea
> the sight of the stars
> the face of the moon
> all shout and scream the terrible deaths of my father

Recording the profound disorientation produced by apartheid, Serote's "Heat and Sweat" (1978:71-72) embodies a poetic discourse which strives to connect the genre to the experience of dispossessed people:

> lost as we are
> torn and bewildered by the sounds of our names

As a healer in the crisis the poet urges the oppressed to rally together:

> don't you hear the songs
> they can live in the present if we let them
> these songs have a prowess of our mother's back
> and the eloquence of our grandmother's foresight
> about the time that never was (1978:71)

The poem celebrates the durability of humble but proven sources of strength, particularly after the setbacks that occurred in the struggle. The poet demonstrates the potential of South African poetry in English to develop from being a marginal art form through participation in the day-to-day struggles. Already in exile by this time, Serote's poem also represents a particular challenge to intellectuals who lived in South Africa.

Freed from conceptualising culture as a marginal and elitist practice as a result of the liberation struggle and the grounded nature of the oral tradition, the resistance writers were able to hone their skills to develop a politically and culturally effective literature.

> In South Africa, the liberation struggle and cultural liberation are parallel processes.... Once the black poet had freed himself from Eurocentric literary conventions, then he was *free* to create within the context of national consciousness (Patel, 1984:85).

Serote's poems from the 1980s express a determination to keep up the momentum for liberation. "No More Strangers" (1982b:135-137) draws upon the history of the various struggles across the country:

> it were us, it is us
> the children of Soweto
> langa, kagiso, alexandra, gugulethu and nyanga
> us

a people with a long history of resistance
us
who will dare the mighty
for it is freedom, only freedom which can quench our thirst (1982b:135)

The desire for liberation was fuelled not only by the impact of "foreign", "Marxist", or "Communist" ideologies as the state charged (although these were significant for their liberatory content and had been influential in other anti-colonial struggles). Ironically, the strongest stimulus for resistance was provided by the apartheid state itself as Serote's "The Breezing Dawn of the New Day" (1982b:138-141) suggests:

we *are* here
betrayed by everything but ourselves
and our best ally is our clarity about who we are
where we come from
who our enemy is
where we want to go to
and these begin to define our natural allies
as we gather force
as we create the storm
since here, we are
talking about a land of many colours and sounds
we sing here, for we can sing still, about a national life (1982b:139-140)

In "Time Has Run Out" (1982b:125-134), Serote draws on the basic rhythms of life to locate resolutions about basic rights like shelter, employment and food:

we design our day
and the day designs us
and new men and women are born
who mourn and bury the dead
who know the price of freedom
and say so
by knowing how to build new countries
where people work and eat
everyone of them (1982b:128)

The poet expresses great conviction through the iconography of nationalism:

this is our land
it bears our blood
it must bear our will (1982b:132)

In Serote's "There will be a Better Time" (1982b:142-144) there is determination to redress the imbalances of apartheid:

no!
no one will have plenty when we have nothing

we say
this is a big land as big as the sky
we can live here
we say
all of us can have enough from this land (1982b:143)

Strong elemental resolutions regarding the land are made:

this is our land
we say
we will live like this is our land
we say (1982b:143)

As the national crisis deepened, Serote recorded the growing anger and defiance:

time has run out for liars
for those who take and take and take from others, take forever!
and keep taking
for themselves alone
take and take and take
time has run out when we say no!
no more -
- no more is not a word but an act,
remember that - !
my little friend (1982b:142)

Towards the end of the poem there is reference to the lessons of exile, which reinforce the sense of grievance and displacement:

we learn
from the knowledge of the world
that we have to know what we want
and what cannot be wanted by anyone (1982b:144)

Taking the opposite approach is Don Mattera's poem "The poet must die..." which carries the dedication "For James Matthews and Gladys Thomas after their poems were executed" (1983:61). Knowing that he was a prime target of the censors, Mattera ridicules the state's actions, its paranoia and cover-ups by challenging it to exceed itself:

The poet must die
His murmuring threatens their survival
His breath could start the revolution;
He must be destroyed.

Ban him.
Send him to the Island
Call the firing squad,
But remember to wipe his blood

From the wall,
Then destroy the wall
Crush the house
Kill the neighbours.

If their lies are to survive
The poet must die...

As Mattera's poem indicates, the brutality of the repression led resistance poets to construct shrewd challenges to their silencing. Another is "War Memorial" (1992:25), a found poem by Keith Gottschalk, which appropriates the text of some prison regulations to expose the state's paranoia. The poet distances himself from the unwitting contributors to his poem by using inverted commas:

"no letter
containing a poem
shall be forwarded
from a prisoner
to the outside,
or from the outside
to a prisoner."

As Brecht has argued, the popular-democratic speaks to and of a people

> who transform the world and who transform themselves; a people in struggle who, for this very purpose, see the combative implications of the concept *popular* (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983:18).

Two plays from the 1980s express recognition by the oppressed of the need to be resolute in their desire for liberation. *Woza Albert!* (Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, 1983) uses the figure of Morena (Christ) to challenge the dependence on the saviour (or any saviour) for deliverance:

> MBONGENI: ... Come on Morena, man! (*Knocking.*) Cell number six! You've got all the power! How can you let these things happen? How can you just sit there like that, Morena? ... I really like you, Morena. But I'm getting bladdy disappointed. How long must we wait for you to do something? Morena, I must tell you, I'm among those who have stopped waiting. One day we'll have to help you! *Phambiti neri-hondo*! (Power to the people!) (1983:63).

An amateur community drama group, The Cape Flats Players, focused on similar themes, even when it was forced to improvise a performance. Since the early 1970s its productions, such as *Senzenina* and *Aluta Continua*, were seen in remote villages and city centres by over 600 000 people. The group drew the attention of the authorities on many occasions. At a performance in Oudtshoorn there were 17 police officers in the theatre. Refusing to be intimidated, the company drew the police into their performance, calling up lighting instructions from the stage to the police officers who had taken over the theatre's

control room (*Weekly Mail*, 12.5.89:33). Thus the players gave their (*bona fide*) audience an impromptu and subtextual performance of how to handle intimidation by the state.

Neither did Mzwakhe Mbuli allow the state to weaken his cultural activism. Despite police harassment, detention and solitary confinement Mbuli kept reconstructing himself as a poet-activist, as he suggests in the poem "Alone" (1989:40-41). In solitary confinement the poet learned that it was up to himself to be resolute. "Creative than Before" (1989a:43) has a powerful set of affirmations, summarised in the opening lines of each stanza: "I am more creative than ever, ever before", "I am more committed than ever, ever before", and "I am more a conqueror than ever, ever before". Each stanza concludes with the same avowal (eg., "Yes, I am more creative than ever, ever before") as the poet signals the determination of activists not to be broken down by isolation.

The forthright title of another of Mbuli's poems "Do not push us too far" (1989:37-8) reinforces the warning at the conclusion:

> The people's patience is not endless
> Yes, victory is certain.

Jeremy Cronin's narrative poem "Walking on Air" (1983:11) also warns about the capacity of people to endure oppression:

> And people said: "Enough,
> our patience, it has limits"

Such words were not just directed at the state, they also served to develop an assertive attitude.

The street theatre of the time also records the refusal of ordinary people to be crushed. When the SADF moved into the townships and began to raid houses and harass residents, ordinary people fought to regain control. Street theatre quickly captured the struggles in a synthesis of music, dance, mime, narrative and an "open" style of street utterance. Reflecting an insistence on the right to be heard, street theatre emerged across the country, generally performed by groups of youths. Most plays were not recorded, but a characteristic determination is apparent in the words of one (unnamed) group of performers in the streets of Durban:

> The soldiers are taking away my brother, my mother babe-in-arms is crying, my father who dared ask "Why?" is lying in the dust nursing the head gash from the butt of a rifle, my protesting sister is sworn at in dirty Afrikaans but I will not be intimidated (*New African*, 12.2.90:13).

The worker poet and cultural activist Alfred Temba Qabula's poem "The Wheel is Turning - The Struggle Moves Forward" (1989:107) uses the wheel (a symbol of worker oppression and production) to attest to the fortitude of the resistance movement:

> In this war

that is being fought around us
we are not turning back
we are wading through the blood
of our kinsfolk
when one of us falls
when one gets
detained
another freedom-fighter
of the exploited is born

Qabula goes beyond the declarations of resolve to develop a mythology of regeneration, as Serote had begun to do in the 1970s. Serote's long poem *No Baby Must Weep* (1975) takes a constructive approach to the misery that has been experienced:

i see that i am the one who has to build this world out of dust
i have to clutch the wound of the trees and birds
tame the snakes and make a path (1975:32)

The gap between the reality and the vision that is willed into being is substantial, and demonstrates Serote's awareness of an ancient meaning of the word "poet": "Through words the poet creates the world all over again" (Watts, 1989:208). Serote has been the major poet of the popular-democratic movement, as the range and depth of his work attests. As healer and liberation prophet Serote did not just represent experience but felt impelled to construct a post-apartheid culture. In this there is concordance between the roles of poet and political activist. The prophetic mode, which inspired people to see beyond the immediate setbacks has served as a self-actualizing narrative.

The bleakness of the situation is evident in the fact that one of the few elements that oppressed people could count on was their numbers. Captive as they were in a culture of deprivation, people learned to be creative with very limited resources, as Serote suggests in "The Breezing Dawn of the New Day" (1982b:138):

since we have come to know what we want
since we know that the mind and nature are god
and that indeed we are our god

The construction of the (oppressed) self as god occurs again in *A Tough Tale* (1987:29):

we are gods...
whose word will be final about our destiny.

The poet suggests that his role as a maker of meanings is linked to the role of oppressed people constructing the political dispensation they desire. This is related to the line "we know of songs made by chains" in Serote's "Behold Mama, Flowers" (1978:59), which suggests the significance of the imagination in advancing beyond the strictures of repression. The idea is developed in another poem from the *Behold Mama, Flowers* collection, "When Lights Go Out" (1978:69-70), which personifies hope:

one day hope begins to walk again
it whispers
about the twisted corpses that we saw
sprawled across the streets on this knowledgeable earth
the tears
the blood
the memory
and the knowledge which was born by every heavy minute that we carried
across a wilderness, where there were no paths
where screams echoed as if never to stop (1978:70)

In the lines that follow the poet emphasizes the necessity for confidence on the part of oppressed people, even in extreme situations:

it is when there is no hope, that hope begins to walk again
yet
like we said
hope never befriends fools (1978:70)

Drawing on an epigram (in the last line) the speaker tries to persuade people who have been systematically weakened and divided to find the inner resources to mobilise again. Many projects of resistance have been predicated upon the anticipation of a better life, as Serote suggests with assurance in *A Tough Tale* (1987:16):

we have arrived
the people are here, something must yield

Less mystical than Serote's poetry, but as generative, is Kelwyn Sole's ironically titled poem "Promised Land" (Petersen, 1992:14-18), which makes a curious observation:

I live in a country where the dead
give birth to their own mothers (1992:16)

These lines suggest that mothers (and, by extension, parents) were politically reborn through the deaths of their children (who may have been activists or random victims in the war waged by the "security forces"). Despite, or because of, the decimation that occurred, the poem reverses the usual sequence in a representation of faith in the resistance.

Writing about the major poets of this period (such as Mtshali, Serote, Mattera, Matthews, Sepamla and Gwala) the critic Alvarez-Pereyre attests to the impact of their achievements:

> Left to themselves and under the pressure of circumstances, the young poets led poetry out of the ghetto in which the purists and the traditionalist anthologies had imprisoned it, and they gave it a new life (1984:40).

Black writers developed a contending cultural discourse and struggled to reach an audience of fellow oppressed people while they engaged in the political struggles and

fended off the censors. In addition, there were the demands of the medium: black writers were also

> learning to write in an alien language unassisted by a supportive literary tradition and the confidence born of a lifetime's use of a mother tongue (Watts, 1989:181).

Their accomplishments are a mark of their resolve, as well as of the struggles and political understanding that informed their work.

As the work of Wally Serote demonstrates, several poets drew on the strong and well established traditions of music to bolster their literary initiatives. In several poems from *Jol'iinkomo* (1977)and *No More Lullabies* (1982) Mafika Pascal Gwala alludes to a range of musical sources to address critical issues, such as the reference to jazz in "Bhoyi" (1982:52-3). In "Getting off the Ride" (1977:60-68) Gwala traces the development of a poet from the isolation of the dominant construction of poets to the confidence and social involvement of the *kwela* musician:

> I'm the lonely poet
> who trudges the township's ghetto passages
> pursuing the light,
> The light that can only come through a totality
> of change:
> Change in minds, change
> Change in social standings, change
> Change in means of living, change
> Change in dreams and hopes, change
> Dreams and hopes that are Black
> Dreams and hopes where games end
> Dreams where there's end to man's
> creation of gas chambers and concentration camps
> I'm the African kwela instrumentalist whose notes
> profess change.

In "love and hate" (1990:38) James Matthews refers reflexively to a musician:

> a man expresses through a horn
> songs of people
> who have suffered
> far too long

Despite the repression Serote brought out his first anthology although, like many other writers and artists of the period, he was beset by anxiety:

> When *Yakhal'inkomo* was published, I was dead scared. I had just come out of prison, out of nine months in solitary confinement, and I was keenly aware of the violence the South African Government had in store for us (Chapman, 1982:113).

In "To whom it may concern" (Royston, 1973:96), Sipho Sepamla's speaker manifests the confidence necessary to address the oppression and silencing, that psychological liberation could be proclaimed:

> Thixo! we want to rejoice
> Celebrating the birth of a new age
> For gone is Kleinbooi
> No more is Sixpence
> John is neither here nor there
> Mary lives no more for tea only!

The speaker rejects the labels that naturalised denigration. S/he dismisses the derogatory names commonly used in the dominant minority languages, and replaces them with African names.

The Culture and Resistance Conference was held in 1982 in Gaborone, Botswana. It brought together about 800 cultural workers, some of whom were in exile. Rejecting insulated aestheticism, the conference declared that there could not be neutral enclaves of privilege in revolutionary situations: "cultural work is part and parcel of the struggle for freedom in South Africa" (Serote, 1990:17). Critical of the role accorded to the artist in western society, the participants chose to refer to themselves as "cultural workers" rather than "artists" (Kross, 1982:11). When the poets conferred they declared that they saw themselves as poets to the people, from the people, and resolved to make their work accessible to all South Africans (Vaughan, 1986:212). The conference was instrumental in bringing black and white cultural activists together. This was part of the construction of a broad unity that was seen as being essential for the struggle for democratic rights. In addition, Gwala points out that the conference

> highlighted the need for art not only to register resentment against social inequality and economic exploitation but also to contest these by creating wider social awareness (1984:37-53).

The conference also decided to embark on a cultural boycott, to intensify the isolation of the regime. The following year the ANC established a Department of Arts and Culture to mobilise and organise cultural workers (Serote, 1990:17).

The Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) was formed in 1987 in an organised move by more than 150 writers with the explicit goal of challenging the repression, as is evident in COSAW's slogan: "Freedom for writers, writers for freedom". While the regional and local structures focused on grassroots development such as writers' workshops, readings and the development of libraries, the national structure played an important role as part of the mass democratic movement against apartheid.

At a community level there were powerful expressions of solidarity in response to the censorship and repression. When organised activities were banned or otherwise silenced the methods of resistance that were used included *toyi toying*, marching, the singing of political songs, posters, slogans and graffiti, with poetry "marching in the front ranks of mass struggles" (Slovo in Corrigall, 1990:60). While the use of props such as wooden

AK47s was prohibited, the state was unable to do much about the graffiti that appeared across the country: "towards the end of 1986 more than half of the township graffiti was political in nature" (1990:60).

Many festivals were banned or restricted, or their organisers were detained. In 1986 three executive committee members of a People's Cultural Festival in the Western Cape were detained. Others stepped in to continue with the organising. The festival was banned the day before it was to begin (Kruss, 1987:184). Later that year a Christmas festival in Cape Town was banned at the last minute. Musical Action for People's Power organised alternative events to cover the musicians' costs. Gillian Slovo points out that

> [o]ne of the noticeable effects on cultural work of increased state repression has been the way culture and cultural organisations have stepped into the vacuum of banned political organisations and imprisoned individuals. Since the organisation of cultural events is flexible this shifting of organisation has meant that a broad sweep of organisations from community groups to unions have been involved in cultural-political events (Corrigall, 1990:59).

The state recognised that its repressive measures were being defeated by the unity of the community based organisations. This was countered, towards the end of 1986, with the Bureau for Information's propaganda song "Together we will build a brighter future". Musicians were attracted with fees of up to R8 000 a day. Cultural workers and organisations such as the South African Musicians' Alliance (SAMA) denounced the project and threatened to boycott musicians who participated. Most of the musicians who had participated in the project apologised and donated their earnings from the song to a trust fund established by SAMA. As a result of the resistance the song that had cost the state R4,3 million never emerged as a record. It was the Bureau for Information's most spectacular failure in the cultural sphere (Slovo in Corrigall, 1990:66-67).

In 1988 a banned Detainees Parents' Support Committee concert was taken over by the Federation of Transvaal Women. In 1989 the End Conscription Campaign was prevented from proceeding with what it called "Towards a People's Culture Festival" by the harsher regulations of the new state of emergency. Cape Flats residents took over the organisation of the festival, secured United Democratic Front and Cape Action League backing and together with organisations such as the Umkhonto Youth Choir from Paarl, the Loyodo Art School, and the Ambanyani dance team they put together a ten day festival at ten different venues in Cape Town and the Cape Flats (Slovo in Corrigall, 1990:59).

In mid-1987 some 200 United Democratic Front (UDF) delegates had met to declare their support for the cultural and academic boycott against the apartheid regime, its beneficiaries, and its international allies. The boycott call had been initiated by the ANC President, Oliver Tambo. The Culture in Another South Africa (CASA) conference that was held in Amsterdam in 1989 declared that

> the total isolation of the apartheid regime must continue. Among the tactics to be employed in this campaign, the academic and cultural boycott are crucial, and must be maintained (Campschreur and Divendal, 1989:215).

8.3 Media: challenging censorship and the "mainstream" media

> By 1963 all the independent organs of black opinion, as well as the socialist and communist newspapers, had been swept away by systematic bannings or by the imprisonment or members of political organisations which had supported and originated these publications (Addison 1978:4).

> We have felt and observed in the past, the existence of a great vacuum in our literary and newspaper world. So many things are said so often to us, about us and for us *but very seldom by us* (Biko in Alvarez-Pereyre, 1984:185).

Information is critical to the functioning of modern industrial societies. As the major source of information, the mass media play a critical role in the construction of public opinion, a concept central to the modern, democratic state. "Democracy - decision making by the people - is impossible without a full and free flow of information to all" (Horn in *South*, 22.6.89:18).

The mass media tend to be very expensive and labour intensive, and those who invest massive sums of money in it generally do so in order to achieve or maintain power. The terms "mass media" and "mass communication" tend to be misleading: such media often do not constitute a vehicle for popular communication, in the sense of dialogue and debate. Instead the mass media tend to encourage their readers/receivers to act as passive consumers of commodified and fragmented news. Across the world mass media are either under the control of state authorities or a few transnational companies (with very few exceptions). Some 90% of foreign news published in the world's newspapers comes from just four news agencies: Reuters (U.K.), Agence France Presse (France), and United Press International and Associated Press (both U.S.). These transnationals also control the production of electronic components, computers, and telecommunications technology. As national economies grow more dependent on these technologies, the power of these companies increase (Myers, 1985:214).

In South Africa the situation was more serious owing to the conservative and "liberal" news monopolies. The control of the press has been central to minority domination in South Africa. The National Party government was particularly sensitive to the political role of the press because the Afrikaner commercial press had served to bring the National Party to power. National Party leaders such as D.F. Malan, J.G. Strijdom, H.F. Verwoerd and P.W. Botha were closely connected to *Die Burger*, *Die Transvaler* and *Die Vaderland* (Hachten and Giffard, 1984:xiv). The last National Party president, F.W. de Klerk, was closely connected to *Die Transvaler*. The far right-wing organisations also control certain newspapers: the Conservative Party has controlled *Die Patriot*, the Herstigte Nasionale Party runs *Die Afrikaner*, and the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging and the Blanke Bevrydingsbeweging own the ultra-right wing *Die Stem*.

The National Party government's control of South African society was most apparent in its monopolisation of vast sections of the mass media. Government control of radio and television broadcasting was managed through state ownership of a substantive portion of the electronic media. As the principal medium of news dissemination under apartheid, the South African Broadcasting Co-operation (SABC) accounted for 90% of the radio and television audiences. The SABC radio stations had a listenership of approximately fifteen million, a significant figure in a country characterised by great distances, poverty and illiteracy. The SABC radio stations were racially and linguistically defined. They had a monopoly on the FM band, which offers the clearest reception at the cheapest rate. Through the better paying and more secure television and radio jobs that the state was able to offer, a different kind of hegemonic control was exerted by the National Party over people with media skills. Further, government control of most of the broadcast media made it easier to ban, without reference to any legislation, a range of cultural products, such as documentaries, films, reggae and rock music, local bands such as the African Youth Band and four tracks from David Kramer's musical *District Six*.

As much as the SABC was an integral part of the government's apparatus of domination, it was also used in the long-term campaigns to try to win "hearts and minds". Controlled by the secret Afrikaner intellectual organisation, the Broederbond, the SABC was used to build consensus. The most obvious instance involved naturalising and legitimating the government's vocabulary of racist euphemisms such as "separate development", "resettlement" and "national states" (Gordimer, 1988a:247). There is irony in Dikobe wa Mogale's reference to the dominant lexicon in "waking up: 09-12-1982" (1984:56-8):

> my countrymen teach me
> how to play with words
> like:
> "national security"
> "terrorist build-up"
> "pre-emptive cross-border strike"

Wa Mogale's fellow trade unionist Frank Meintjies elaborated on the issue:

> In our struggle, the battle over language intrudes into every struggle, campaign and event. Daily we encounter the state's use of its powerful institutions and vast resources to define crucial aspects of reality in such a way as to deny the experience and perspective of the masses. Examples of this are the creation of official terms such as "unrest", "bantustan", "terrorist", "enemy", "law and order" etc. (1989:25-26).

The success of the state's propaganda in some sections of society is indicated by the 1974 survey that found that a majority of English-speaking whites thought that SABC radio was "the most reliable and unbiased source" of news on South African politics (Hachten and Giffard, 1984: 217). This is an index of the crisis of assumptions that informed elite constructions of South African society. Wa Mogale sought to pre-empt the disclaimer "We did not realise what was happening":

my countrymen
teach me how
to shut my conscience
to the sermon of the
World Council of Churches
that done my countrymen
teach me how to muffle and suffocate
the screams of men and women

Wa Mogale was particularly scathing when referring to apartheid "facts" and metaphysics, for censorship and propaganda were vital to the maintenance of the minority hegemony:

my countrymen
you with your "newsbulletins"
dripping with our sweat and blood
my countrymen
you with your epilogues
from gunships

In "moegoes en klevas" (1984:54-55) Wa Mogale exposes the casual negligence and racism that underpinned SABC journalism despite the fact that the majority of its listeners were black:

die same old story
"quiet weekend in Soweto - 23 Dead"

Through censorship the government was able to exert control over all sections of the media. More than 100 laws restricted information about most aspects of South African life. Some of these included the Police Act, which placed severe controls on the reporting of any police activity; the Prisons' Act which kept the prisons and prisoners out of public scrutiny; the Defence Act which gave the state virtually total control over reports on the movement of troops (making it possible to prevent the reportage of an entire war). The Official Secrets Act (subsequently, and ironically, renamed the Protection of Information Act) silenced reportage on virtually all official government documents. The Internal Security Act empowered the government to close publications, detain people, ban individuals or organisations, "list" people who were not to be quoted, and generally outlaw a range of political activities, including the expression of "subversive" views. The Publications Act empowered the Directorate of Publications to censor all films before public screening and ban newspapers, magazines, books or other objects. Under this act media such as *The World*, *Weekend World*, *New Age*, *Fighting Talk*, *Sechaba*, *African Communist*, and *International Defence and Aid Fund* (IDAF) publications were banned until 1990.

Resistance writers drew on prose and poetry to challenge the repression and the monopolies on the media. Wally Serote's poem "Ofay-Watcher Looks Back" (1972:57) expresses the importance of independent observation in an increasingly controlled environment:

I look at what happened
When knives creep in and out of people
As day and night into time...
I look at what happened
When jails are becoming necessary homes for people
Like death comes out of disease,

I want to look at what happened.

The "Muldergate" information scandal showed the lengths to which the state was prepared to go to secure its interests. In 1978 it was revealed that the Vorster government had used state funds (approximately $74 million had been placed in a secret fund in 1972) to try to win the hearts and minds of its opponents both inside and outside the country. This included about R32 million for the establishment of a pro-government English medium newspaper, *The Citizen* in 1975 (since no other English medium paper supported the government). The illegal activities of the government's Information Department implicated the Prime Minister B.J. Vorster, his successor, the Information Minister Connie Mulder, the head of the powerful Bureau for State Security, General Hendrik van den Berg (all of whom had to resign in disgrace) and other cabinet ministers such as the Finance Minister, Owen Horwood. Horwood protested his innocence although the Information Secretary Eschel Rhoodie later implicated him, Mulder and Vorster. Nobody was jailed, not even Rhoodie. Rather than propose reforms the government restricted the future reporting of its scandals (Hachten and Giffard, 1984:6-7; 229-261). The SABC avoided reporting on the scandal, which was "a scandal in itself" (1984:215).

Print media ownership has been controlled by the giants of English and Afrikaner capital in South Africa: in the 1970s and 1980s some 80% of the press was controlled by Anglo-American, and most of the rest was under the control of Sanlam. The Anglo-American newspaper company, Argus, controlled 55% of the daily newspapers (eg, *The Daily News, The Natal Mercury, Star,* and *Sowetan* as well as weeklies like *Sunday Tribune* and *Post*). Times Media Limited owned *Sunday Times, Business Day, Financial Mail, Eastern Province Herald,* and *Cape Times* among others. Nasionale Pers (which has been run by the Transvaal section of the National Party) has owned *City Press, Beeld, Die Burger, Volksblad* and others, while Perskor (which has been run by the Cape section of the National Party) has owned *Die Transvaler* and *Die Vaderland* among others. Between them these four companies have owned 39 of the 42 urban daily and weekly newspapers. They have also controlled a third of the 33 papers registered as "country press," more than 80% of S.A.'s registered freesheets, and almost half of S.A.'s registered magazines. There were a few small independently-owned anti-apartheid, liberal (in the broader sense) newspapers, like *The Natal Witness*. The conglomerates Anglo-American and Sanlam also control the newsprint industry cartel (Mondi, Sappi, etc), the three companies that distribute newspapers nationwide, and SAPA (the South African Press Association) which is the most powerful source of news in the country.

In Serote's ironically titled poem "The Face of a Happening" (1972:47-48) the speaker reacts to the failure of the press to render the news:

> I look at the newspapers. I see the face of a happening.
> I don't read it. I don't talk about it. I don't write about it.
> It's just there. How long?
> And like I have just woken up,
> Things unfold themselves but I stop them.
> And I sit and look through the gap between the curtains
> And I feel like saying this is not the way to look at the world.
> Where's the world? How do you look at it?

Most of the English commercial press had a history of seeming to attack the government. For years, the English press tended to regard itself as the unofficial opposition. However, it offered opposition only in limited areas, such as parliamentary politics and in matters of nonfundamental change, such as the lifting of petty apartheid. For these reasons the English press has generally been part of the white power structure, serving the interests of whites and actually legitimating the regime through its token opposition (Hachten and Giffard, 1984:xii), thus aiding the image of the apartheid state as a democracy. Its opposition within narrow limits made little difference to the structures of power:

> Press opposition... tends to be vigorous only within relatively safe limits; major patterns of power, especially economic power, are rarely challenged (Hachten and Giffard, 1984:97).

The owners of the English commercial press (who held monopolies in the South African economy) and their target audiences (some four-fifths of whom voted for the National Party in the last white election) were very much part of the dominant power structure with vested interests in the status quo. This accounts for the ambiguity that characterised the commercial press. Although most of these newspapers made claims to being liberal, "the corporately owned media, white-financed and white-run [were] wary of any news and views smacking of radicalism" (Addison 1978:4).

The hegemonic power that the state exerted over the ostensibly independent English-language press was shown up by the "alternative" media and the resistance writers.[3] Progressive writers felt compelled to challenge the images of resistance figures in the "mainstream" white South African press. One of the most notorious examples involved the "liberal" presses reproduction of the government and SABC's construction of Desmond Tutu as a "communist".

Another case of unprofessional conduct by the "liberal" press involved Marion Sparg, a member of *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, who placed a limpet mine which blew up four floors of the security branch headquarters at the John Vorster Square. Annemarie Hendrikz' poem "For Marion Sparg: In reaction to a report in the Cape Times 7.11.86" (Schreiner, 1992:45) registers solidarity with Sparg by condemning the malicious reportage which portrayed her as being disturbed. Hendrikz uses parody to expose the kangaroo court by which the newspaper (and others, such as *The Sunday Times*) tried Sparg. Beginning with the discourse of the law courts, the poem shows the emptiness of the "liberal" avowals regarding independence, fairness and "objectivity". It was to be expected that the conservative press, which was either government-supporting or state-run would vilify Marion Sparg in a trial-by-media in advance of the legal proceedings. However, the

response of the English-language "liberal" press offered an unusually frank picture of the visceral combination of racism and sexism that has underpinned supposedly dispassionate media reportage.

The "liberal" press seemed unable to believe that a white woman could have bombed the security branch headquarters out of ideological conviction. Hendrikz suggests how the dominant media rationalised Sparg's actions by imposing their obsession with how women look rather than recognising that Sparg's political philosophy might have better explained her actions. By their reasoning a white woman who betrayed the interests of "her community" (an essentialist construction) could only have been driven to do so because she was physically (equated with "sexually") unattractive and therefore unable to secure (white) male attention. This, by their reasoning, left her susceptible to ANC (implicitly equated with "black, male") propaganda.[4] So threatened were they that "their woman" could serve "the enemy" that they could not leave the judgement of Marion Sparg to the judicial process (which they could have relied upon to secure their common interests, since judges were government appointees). Instead, through their vilification of Marion Sparg they subtly threatened other white women who considered "betraying white interests" with the possibility of a damaging trial by media.

> How do you plead?
>
> Guilty your Honour
> Guilty
> Guitly
> Guilty and proud
>
> Twenty five years for you.
>
> Not for treason
> Not for arson
>
> Not for courage
> nor commitment
>
> Twenty five years for Aggravating Factors
> Woman.
> White.
> Misguided
> by Joe Slovo.
> A history
> of obesity
> inability
> to relate socially.
> Very aggravating indeed.
>
> Viva woman
> Beautiful, brave, fat, white, woman.
> Viva (1992:45).

The complicity of the conservative liberal media interests with the state is most evident in the deal that was struck when Times Media Limited, Argus, Nasionale Pers and Perskor combined forces to create an "independent" television station. In developing M-NET they disregarded the vast news resources that they controlled and chose to focus on escapist entertainment while carrying no news at all. Given the need for information in the increasingly repressive situation under the states of emergency in the 1980s, this suggests the government's hegemonic control over information.

It emerges that despite the claims of the press to represent "public opinion" most were cowed by, or in complicity with, the regime (which has been confirmed by the submissions of journalists and media owners to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1997). There were a few exceptions, such as the *Rand Daily Mail* and the East London *Daily Dispatch*, which had more black readers than white readers by the 1980s. *The World*, edited by Percy Qoboza, was also an exception. Although *The World* had traded on the "standard sex-sin-soccer formula", it gave extensive coverage and commentary to the 1976 Soweto uprising, which marked its development as "a serious social and political commentator" (Addison, 1978:4-5). In October 1977, a month after Biko was tortured to death, all opposition organisations and *The World*, the fastest-growing English-language paper in the country and the *Weekend World* were banned (Hachten and Giffard, 1984:136). Qoboza was locked up for several months and the Union of Black Journalists was also banned.

Many black journalists were frustrated with the oppressive government and the white-dominated profession, and this was reflected in the bitter strike action in 1980 of the black Media Workers Association of South Africa (successor to the banned Union of Black Journalists and the Writers' Association of South Africa), which represented 90% of all black journalists, and many technical workers as well. The strike showed the growing differences between black journalists and the majority of white journalists and editors on the English newspapers (Hachten and Giffard, 1984:139).

In the early 1980s, when the townships began to resist the rent and transport increases, oppressed people still had little access to public representation. Further, people were often confused or overwhelmed by the media representations of themselves. This is evident in *Asinamali* (Ngema, 1985), in Solomzi Bisholo's distracted narrative of how Sebokeng residents defended themselves during the war with the security forces:

> Some of us were left lying on the ground. Forward! Don't be afraid. Media. Snapshots. Next morning I was on the front page.

Well before the media restrictions of the state of emergency, the commercial press would offer only superficial reportage of "black news": without the courage and determination of black journalists like Peter Magubane and Alf Khumalo little would have been documented about the Soweto uprising. Senzo Malinga challenges the dominant media representations in his poem "The Only House with a Gate" (1990:69), which deals with the forced removals at St Wendolin's. Malinga parodies the bizarre way in which the commercial press tended to report on "black news", with more interest in the formal

patterns than in the effects of oppression on its victims (like the conservative liberal critics of resistance literature):

> The press said the bulldozers worked
> in harmonious unison with the baton charges
> and teargas

The producers and contributors to "alternative" magazines and journals were among the few who were prepared to really fight for freedom of expression. Literary magazines continued to appear although they were subject to close scrutiny and censorship by the state. *Donga*, which began appearing in 1976, published material in English, Afrikaans and occasionally in seTswana. Contributors attacked the militarism and the Calvinist morality of the state in their stories. *Donga's* association with the cultural organisation Medupe led to its silencing in 1978.

In the frontline of the struggle against the media of indoctrination was a literary magazine, *Staffrider*, which was launched in 1978 by a university English lecturer, Mike Kirkwood, who had challenged the conservative liberal orthodoxies in academia (1976). *Staffrider* represented "a certain 'democratization' of imaginative literature, and of the image of the writer and artist" (Vaughan, 1986:202). As *Staffrider* challenged the dominant orthodoxy that literature and other forms of cultural production were elitist preserves, it activated a range of popular-democratic voices. In the 1970s *Staffrider* had a print run of 10 000 copies, which was about ten to twenty times the size of other literary magazines in English (Oliphant in Petersen and Rutherford, 1992:92).

A "staffrider", as the first editorial explained, is a "*skelm* [rascal] of sorts" (*Staffrider*, 1978:1), and comes from the urban youth who climb onto the roof of a train as it leaves a station, imitating the railway staff in that they board at the last second and do not pay. The magazine and the typical *Staffrider* writer were therefore understood to be like the *skelm* on the train, "a miscreant hanging at an acute angle to official law and convention. Tenacious and precarious, at odds with state decree" (Vaughan, 1986:226). Motshile Nthodi's "Staffrider, a poem" (1978:28) captures the energy, the spectacle and the defiant nature of popular culture, as embodied in the magazine's title and ethos:

> I'm on top of the coach
> lying eight inches under
> the main power lines
>
> ACROBATIC HEY
>
> They see me once again
> but only once
> I'm under the coach
> lying on a steel frame
> next to the wheels
>
> CIRCUS HEY

fifteen stations
stupids packed
sardines in the tube

phapha - pha -
poor black eyes on me
- phapha -
home station
- pha - phapha - phaphaphaphapha

WA SALA WENA

- phaphapha -
railway police chasing me
I jump the platform
the railway line
the fence
across the river

towards home
I'm safe

The daring and youthful flaunting of rules that characterised *Staffrider* magazine is matched in the final stanza by the audacious promise of further appearances:

this is the Saturday programme
and till we meet again
thank you brothers and sisters,
thank you.

From the first issue, *Staffrider* challenged the authority of the concept "literary" in its content, format, production and distribution, as a statement on Contents page clarified, under the heading "About *Staffrider*":

> Standards are not golden or quintessential: they are made according to the demands different societies make on writers, and according to the responses writers make to those demands ("no editor or editorial board", 1978:1).

Rather than serving as a showcase for polished literature, the emphasis of *Staffrider* was upon work in progress. *Staffrider* challenged the cultural values of the conservative liberals, their presumption to impose their values and to represent and judge others. It sought to develop a sense that "the creation of cultural power is progressive, conscious and organised" (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1980:113).

As a result of the forum provided by such a magazine the values and the politics involving the constitution of South African literature was debated, not just by white intellectuals but

by black intellectuals, workers, and township poetry and performance groups. Vaughan clarifies the broad orientation of the magazine:

> The "staffrider" figure is not... a specifically proletarian figure. More obviously he is a broadly "popular" figure. He is always to be found in juxtaposition to images of the people, the masses, the suffering and oppressed multitudes, the community (1986:209-210).

While it did not focus specifically on the development of working class literature the magazine contributed to the mobilisation and coalescence of the popular and democratic forces that were beginning to emerge.

The first issue was banned, because some poems apparently undermined the police. When the censors banned *Staffrider* 2.1 (March 1979) the publishers printed the letter in *Staffrider* 2.2. The censors had objected to "unfair, one-sided and offensive portrayals of police actions and methods, calculated to evoke hatred and contempt of them" (1979:2-3). They argued that "Tribute to Mapetha" by Bafana Buthelezi (*Staffrider* 2.1 1979:49) referred to Mapetla Mohapi, Biko's associate, who had been detained in 1976 and died in detention, and they objected to the poet's indictment of the police. What was novel in the censors' approach was their attempt to act almost liberal, conceding that: "the publication is not without literary merit.... poetic licence generally applies to publications of this nature" (1979:2). The censor's reference to "literary merit" shows unprecedented shrewdness, although the criteria that informed the censors' judgements remained obscure. The publishers responded by suggesting that the censors' liberal pose was a sham:

> the perception of the police as brutal by black writers, who are in rapport with the black community at large, is a sad fact of South African life which cannot be wished away. To disguise it by censorship can only exacerbate, not alleviate the problem (1979:3).

The censors apparent liberalisation marked the state's attempt to divide the rising petty bourgeoisie/intermediate class from the masses by entrenching class differences packaged as formal differences. An explanation that clarifies the motives of the state censors is found in the work of Paulo Freire: "the phenomenon of the emerging masses forces the power elites to experiment with new forms of maintaining the masses in silence" (1985:78). This was what *Staffrider*, with its broad positioning, tried to challenge. In this the magazine anticipated the rising resistance movement.

In 1985 the struggle in South Africa was very prominently reported in the international news. International pressure mounted on the government, which proved unable to deliver significant reforms, the rand plummeted and multinational companies started to withdraw. Unhappy with its international image the government decided that the fault lay with the progressive forces in the media and tried to stop issues and events becoming news. P.W. Botha believed that there was a "total onslaught on South Africa" by internal and external enemies, and that to maintain the status quo a counter-attacking "total strategy" was required. Total strategy required, among other measures, a press that conformed, and did not side with "the enemy". The state of emergency imposed on 20 July 1985 was aimed at

controlling freedom of expression. The Public Safety Act (sic) was used to declare the State of Emergency.

Under the State of Emergency the minority government appeared, through its Emergency Media Regulations, to be arming itself with powers it already had. Despite the battery of laws that screened the activity of the security forces from the public (the ironically named Protection of Information Act, etc) the government believed it needed greater control over the flow of information and to crack down on dissident photographers and journalists. The emergency regulations freed the government from having to go through the courts to silence dissident media. The new regulations gave the Minister of Home Affairs and Communication more streamlined procedures and even more absolute powers of closure, seizure, suspension and censorship for dealing with political dissent. On previous occasions the press had been able to defend itself against harsh legislation by going to the courts. The Emergency prevented the media from being able to appeal to the courts. The government had given itself the power to seize and suspend any news medium without having to bother with prosecution. Daily the press risked fines of R20 000 or 10 year sentences for breach of the regulations. Anton Harber, the editor of *Weekly Mail*, which was one of the strongest "alternative" media under the states of emergency, points out that the state coerced the media to censor themselves:

> rather than scrutinising material before publication, the government would threaten drastic measures against anyone who broke emergency regulations; and the regulations were so vague and so widely cast that the most straightforward reporting became a hazardous task (Harker, 1994:150).

The censors refused to allow newspapers to render any traces of censorship:

> Blank spaces and obliterations - used by the *Weekly Mail* to signal censorship - were banned. The authorities realised that nothing frightened the public more than white spaces in newspapers: vivid imaginations filled the spaces with reports far worse than those that had been removed. Suddenly one could not even be allowed to imagine what might have happened (1994:150).

The media were required to publish only the official version of "unrest" incidents, which emanated from the state's Bureau for Information. Keith Gottschalk's poem "The Journalists' Four Ws: who, what when & where" (1992:66) offers a parody of the news reports that were permissible:

> After the last press amendment acts
> the *Ghetto Extra* reported:
>
> at a place & date
> we are prohibited to specify,
> a squad
> some in, most not in
> uniforms

the law proscribes us naming
committed acts
the minister forbids us to mention.

the Families announce:

the funeral is on saturday.

Through the Bureau for Information the state sought to control the flow of information through extensive restrictions on the press and wide-ranging prohibitions on subversive statements: "It was illegal to name detainees, except those acknowledged by the police, and it was illegal to refer to police conduct" (Baskin, 1991:135). In comparison with the poorly funded and harassed "alternative" press the Bureau for Information had 697 staff, a head office and 13 regional offices, and an annual budget of R33 million (*Weekly Mail*, 30.6.89). As the only legal source of news the bureau seemed committed to delaying, obscuring, censoring and suppressing news, which resulted in a news blackout, under which the state launched its most savage attack on the democratic opposition.

The state made severe attacks on the "alternative" press. The "alternative press" were prepared to challenge censorship to the extent that the battle against censorship became a pillar of the struggle against apartheid:

> The "struggle" was foremost a struggle to make the voice of the majority heard .... Freedom of expression was at the core of the fight for political change (Harber in Harker, 1994:150).

It was left to the "alternative" media to struggle for those rights, on meagre resources and under increasingly precarious conditions. Most of the small independent news agencies, such as ELNews, were attacked by mysterious so-called "third force" elements.

South, *Weekly Mail*, *New African* and *Grassroots* were regularly harassed and seized. Through the Publications Act *Grassroots*, *South* and *New Nation* were temporarily banned; and *Vrye Weekblad*, *Weekly Mail* and *South* were prosecuted. Many journalists, whom the state labelled "media terrorists", were imprisoned. In 1986, some 89 media workers were detained, some for lengthy periods (Webster, 1987:159). The journalists who were detained for lengthy periods during the states of emergency included the Eastern Cape activist-journalist Brian Sokhutu, and the leader of the Media Workers' Association of South Africa (MWASA), Zwelakhe Sisulu. Veliswa Mhlawuli, a journalist with the *Grassroots* community newspaper in Cape Town was shot and left for dead. While covering the battle between comrades and Witdoeke at Crossroads, George De'Ath was been beaten and hacked by vigilantes in the presence of security forces. He later died.

Kaiser Mabhilidi Nyatsumba who is currently a political journalist, wrote an ironic poem, "The Written Word" (1989:96), which addresses the state's problems with freedom of expression in the mid-1980s:

the written word in this
in this country

has become
public enemy number one

the written word
must be
silenced
jailed
expunged
or outlawed

Besides newspapers, pamphlets and posters were confiscated. The state embarked on disinformation programmes against the banned political and worker organisations, as well as the End Conscription Campaign. At the same time it tried to impose a writers' register, to control the work produced by freelance journalists. In the month that the defiance campaign against the state began in 1989 seventy-four journalists were arrested (*Weekly Mail*, 8.9,89:16).

The state had control of the film industry just through the subsidies that it granted. It also imposed strict censorship: movies were heavily suppressed under the state of emergency, for instance, the Durban Film Festival of 1988 had 3 out of 17 films banned, while one was cut and one was restricted outright. Given the repressive situation poetry had to be used to challenge the organs of the state. As Horn argues in an essay,

> Poetry is a means of survival in the trauma of this society, and a means of survival in the flood of media propaganda: so "we mount the words till we can swim" (1994:57, quoting Serote in *A Tough Tale*, 1987:24).

New Nation and *New African* newspapers published poetry every week. The Pietermaritzburg newspaper editor Khaba Mkhize gave readers a forum to express themselves through the columns of the *Echo Newspaper*, the (ethnic) supplement to *The Natal Witness*. Mkhize explains why the newspaper column was especially popular while there were severe restrictions on the freedom of expression:

> Because in poetry you can get away with who, where and why, messages directed against dangerous politics could be said without repercussions.... It gives the man in the street a platform (1990:3).

In the context of prohibitive, restraining discourse (interdiction) poetry afforded a rare space for expression. As the repression intensified the role of the cultural workers increased.

Notes

1. Refer to the editorial in *Staffrider* 2.2 (1979:2-3).

2. The Kenyan activist-playwright Ngugi wa Thiong'o had similar experiences with his plays in Nairobi, which were acceptable to the Arap Moi government in English but not in Gikuyu.

3. The role of the media under apartheid has been the subject of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission inquiry (1997).

4. Notwithstanding Joe Slovo who, as a communist, was beyond the pale.

Chapter Nine: Addressing the killings committed by the state

9.1 Challenging the security force killings

> Word and act have become one: poetic form resolves itself in historical action - "no more is not a word but an act, remember that (Watts, 1989:208-9; quoting Serote's "There will be a better time", 1982b:142).

When addressing the many deaths at the hands of the state's security forces the resistance poets demonstrate a profound recognition that literary discourse is itself a power to be seized. The poems are not just reactive, as in the case of some of the literary constructions that address the brutality of the regime. They deal with the challenge of physical and political obliteration by drawing on the imaginative will. In these developments there are intimations of the transformatory political agenda that had been developing in the liberation movement. For these reasons it is not appropriate to address the security force killings of activists in the section on security force repression (in the third chapter): through their responses to the decimation of activists the resistance writers challenged the state's monopoly on meaning. Further, while the poets' responses to the deaths in detention have superficial similarities to the satirical poems addressed earlier (in the fifth chapter), there are critical differences, such as the writers' attitudes towards the subject, and the writers' construction of their intended readers.

Activists who were captured and at the mercy of the police had to negotiate for their lives just as they had earlier bargained for better conditions for their communities. In captivity the state's total control over the criminal justice system meant that the lives of activists were subject to the whims of the security forces. Peter Horn's empathetic poem "The sixth elegy" (1991, 92-3) details the resolve that drove thousands of activists to risk their lives for freedom:

> Their heroism grew out of despair, the endless defeats
> in the struggle for a few pennies more to survive,
> their fights to say what was needed to be said,
> to awaken the masses, beaten by their masters, and resigned
> to be beaten.
>
> They hardened in jails, in trials
> always prepared to give way, to avoid the fate of the fighter
> but forced by the logic of the struggle to go one step further,
> so as not to be crushed. Fearing death, they overcame their fear of death.

This is in contrast to Farouk Asvat's poem that satirically points out the absence of "Possibilities for a man hunted by SBs" (1982:19)[1]. The word "possibilities" is pivotal, for it functions ironically to emphasize the contingent nature of the lives of activists. The chain of

supposed options suggest that if there are any choices at all, they are severely circumscribed by the nature of the system of oppression. This is clear in the serial risks that activists have run. Asvat's repeated use of the word "possibilities" emphasizes the stark absence of any favourable options. The chances that activists were forced to take with their lives resulted in many deaths at the hands of the police. The terrible march of "But ifs" in the poem anticipates the ever present dangers. Yet the desire for freedom that drove thousands of people to take chances with their lives was stronger than all the odds against them:

> There's one of two possibilities
> Either they find you or they don't
> If they don't it's ok
> But if they find you
> There's one of two possibilities
> Either they let you go or they ban you
> If they let you go it's ok
> But if they ban you
> There's one of two possibilities
> Either you break your ban or you don't
> If you don't it's ok
>
> But if you break your ban
> There's one of two possibilities...
> Either they find you guilty or not guilty...
> Either they suspend your sentence or they jail you...
> Either they release you
> Or you fall from the tenth floor.

Many activists hoped that despite the systematic decimation of resistance leaders, their deaths would bolster mobilization, or an increased commitment to carrying out the political work that was necessary. This view is evident in Keith Gottschalk's poem "The Assassination of Richard Turner" (1992:93):

> banned from politics
> now banned from life...
> for every tombstone in every cemetery in our country
> a thousand clenched fists are raised in freedom!

It has been estimated that from 1963 to 1990 between 75 and 100 political detainees died in detention, in addition to the countless instances of police brutality and torture (Powell, 1996:16). These figures do not include deaths that occurred in police custody while people were held under unspecified powers, or the deaths resulting from kidnapping and/or murder, as in the cases of Siphiwo Mthimkulu, the Cradock Four, the Pebco Three, Stanza Bopape or the cold-blooded police killings of activists like Ashley Kriel, or untold others.

An analysis of the official post-mortem results of those known to have died in detention suggests that twenty-one were declared to have died of natural causes (two of whom, James Tyitya and Suliman Saloojee, died after spending less than a day in detention). Thirty-three died as a result of suicide (including "death as a result of suicide by unspecified means" as the

courts declared). Four died "by accident", seven from "unknown causes" and eight as a result of being killed by police officers (McBride in Harker, 1994:127).

Poetry follows history when the mass media are silent or stifled. Each of the following lines of Mafika Gwala's "Afrika at a Piece" (1982:44-46) addresses the improbable explanations that the state offered for a range of deaths in detention. The prison officials' explanations for these and other deaths in detention were patently absurd but were accepted every time by the courts. Gwala emphasises the location of each miscarriage of justice:

> at John Vorster
> where Timol dived through the window
> at Auden House
> where Mdluli made a somersault stunt
> at Sanlam building
> where Biko knocked himself out against
> the walls
> at the Kei Road copshop
> where Mapetla thought hanging was fun
> at Caledon Square
> where Imam Haroon slipped on a bar of soap

In September 1969 Imam Abdullah Haroon died in detention in Cape Town after he "slipped down the stairs", according to the official explanation. There was no accounting for the twenty-seven bruises on his body.

Ahmed Timol was detained for five days under the Terrorism Act in October 1971 at John Vorster Square, the security police headquarters. According to the official explanation he "fell from the tenth floor window at police headquarters, Johannesburg while being interrogated" (Powell, 1996:16). The police account of the incident is riddled with contradictions and inaccuracies, while Timol's gouged eye, bruises and scratches upon bruises (1996:15, 18-20) offered unequivocal evidence of torture. The callousness and the equivocation of the security police is captured in a poem by A.N.C. Khumalo (one of the pseudonyms of Ronnie Kasrils), "In Interrogation: an epitaph to Ahmed Timol and others" (Feinberg, 1980:54-5):

> your son is dead
> he has fallen from a window...
> They spoke of the leap
> like an Olympic feat;
> we never use force
> it was a matter of course
> some hang themselves
> some slip on soap
> this one chose to jump.

The last line shows up the lies that the security police told time and again, and is supported by the ironic lines in Wally Serote's "Child of the Song" (1978:79-80):

> remember how someone's baby rushed out of the tenth floor

and crushed on the tar
his blood splashing on the flower petals in the garden
so you heard the laughter of the law.

Kasrils' poem also refers to the death of the trade unionist Joseph Mdluli in March 1976. According to the autopsy Mdluli had died "through the application of force to the neck". Four security police officers were charged with manslaughter but were acquitted by the court.

Mapetla Mohapi was the first BC member to die in detention. An administrator of the BC project Zimele, he was detained under the Terrorism Act in July 1976 and died in detention a few weeks later, as a result of "force applied to the neck". According to the police he hanged himself with two pairs of jeans. In their testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (in April and May 1996) the relatives of people who died in detention, like Nohle Mohapi (whose husband was Mapetla Mohapi) and Hawa Timol (whose son was Ahmed Timol), deplored the appalling behaviour of the security police when informing a family of the death in detention. Gwala, Serote and Kasrils' poems referred to such callousness.

The regime managed to outdo its own record of excess in the harassment, detention, torture and murder of Steve Biko. Biko had been arrested and detained many times under the Terrorism Act. In 1975 he was detained without trial for 137 days, and released without being charged. In August 1976 he was held in solitary confinement for 101 days. In March 1977 he was arrested, detained and then released. In July 1977 he was arrested, charged and released on bail. Finally, in August 1977 he was arrested and detained. The Minister of Justice, Police and Prisons, Jimmy Kruger, tried to have it believed that Biko died while on a "hunger strike", which did not explain the wounds to his head that the autopsy recorded (Meli, 1988:177). Serote records Biko "as the 45th to be in the hands of mad men" in "Time has run out" (1982b:125-134). The poem was first published in the collection *The Night Keeps Winking* (1982a), which Serote failed to have published in South Africa[2]. Serote used the poem to try to comprehend the last few hours of Biko's life. The last line shows the paradox of the state's response to one of most incisive analysts of South African society:

and then he was naked
and then he was chained on the leg
and then he was on the floor covered with a blanket
in a landrover
destined to make 1 000 km in that state -
to another cell,
where he woke up one morning naked
chained
alone
with a brain damage (1982b:126)

In Biko's case, as in all the others that managed to get to court, the judicial system found no one responsible. The South African Medical and Dental Council rushed to exonerate the medical personnel who were patently accessories to the cover-up, the Port Elizabeth district surgeon, Ivor Lang and the chief district surgeon, Benjamin Tucker.

The response of the professional medical association was matched by the self-absorption of the conservative liberal establishment. Mindful of the conservative liberal distaste for "political" poetry, Keith Gottschalk clarifies the intimate connection of torture and deaths in detention to the work of South African writers in the poem "Semiotic Events" (Oliphant, 1992:463-4):

> Somewhere, scanned and stressed,
> a frail phoneme, in solitary,
> kicked to the floor

In 1976 some 22 people were known to have been killed in detention, but their deaths received little attention in the press (Motlhabi, 1984:149-150). This is one of the reasons so many poems have been written about these atrocities.

The concluding stanza of Peter Horn's poem "The police are looking for somebody" (1991:73) uses repetition of two forms of the indeterminate subject to contrast the vulnerability of the detainees with the impunity of the prison officials:

> Somebody is falling from a window...
> somebody is battered in a windowless room
> that room is part of a police station
> nobody knows their names
> nobody knows how many there are
> nobody knows the graves
> but next year their names will flower

To counterbalance the pathos there is an echo, in the concluding line, of the optimistic and militant conclusion of the Angolan poet-activist Jorge Rebelo's "Poem" (Soyinka, 1975:231-2):

> In our land
> Bullets are beginning to flower.

In "Gravel in my Throat" (Feinberg, 1980:111-112) Duncan Matlho, who had escaped from prison and fled the country, addresses the stock excuses that police made for the many deaths in detention in a tone that suggests scepticism. Another political prisoner, Jeremy Cronin, used the analogy of a mother trying to lull a questioning child to sleep as a mechanism of indictment in "Lullaby" (1983:96-7). The form that the mother's answer takes is ironic. Far from being diminishing, the word "Only" emphasizes the dubious explanations that the police produced over the years. Such travesties were normal under the apartheid state. The child is significant not only because of the stock image of questing innocence but because by this time older children were in the forefront of the struggle against apartheid:

> But who killed Johannes, mama...
> Only a bar of soap they said....
> But who killed Ahmed, mama...
> Only the tenth floor, I heard....
> But who killed Joseph, mama...

Only a flight of stairs, I read....
But who killed Steve, mama...
A brick wall, the magistrate said

The innocent question and answer form parallels and contradicts the inquest attendant upon many a death in detention. To no one's surprise, the magistrate serving on Biko's inquest was lulled by the feeble explanations of the security police and the medical officers. In death people like Biko were as poorly served by the judicial system as they had been in life.

Anger about the number of deaths in detention is expressed in the defiant title of Oupa Thando Mthimkulu's poem: "Let's Boycott Death" (Van Wyk, Conradie and Constandaras, 1988:642). The same attitude is evident in Dikobe wa Mogale's treatment of the frequency of deaths in detention in both his collections. In "milestones" (1984:25-6) Wa Mogale refers archly to the bizarre official excuses:

the dull thuds
of detainees falling
from soap bars

As an activist who experienced several previous periods of detention since June 1976, Wa Mogale had an agonising proximity to the subject. The collection in which "milestones" appears, *baptism of fire* (1984), was published shortly after Wa Mogale was detained in solitary confinement, then charged, tried and sentenced to ten years of imprisonment for furthering the aims of the African National Congress and for carrying out *Umkhonto we Sizwe* operations. The poem "milestones" records the powerlessness of a captive community to challenge the refusal of the police to render any details regarding a death in detention, much less to take responsibility for such an occurrence:

a mother's son
who died at an undisclosed prison
of undisclosed causes
at an undisclosed time

Wa Mogale is not overstating the case: in the two years after his anthology appeared (ie., between 1984 and 1986) at least 18 people who were detained for political reasons died in police custody (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:135-6).

In the poem "there are many ways" (1992:5-7), from Wa Mogale's second collection, his speaker lists the "ways to kill a man"[3], with the manner of one who has learnt to be cynical about the prospect of dying at the hands of the apartheid securocrats:

in an age of skyscrapers
you may dispose of him
by opening a window
for fresh air

Despite the grimness of the subject, laughter allowed oppressed people to confront

> the fears and oppressions of everyday life [for] from these brief moments another unofficial truth emerged.... The people play with terror and laugh at it; the awesome becomes a "comic monster" (Bakhtin, 1984:91)

The fact that not all poets could transcend the horror of the killings of detained people shows the might of the dominant, which secures its power through violence, prohibition, intimidation and limitations (Bakhtin, 1984:90). Horror at the deaths in detention is mixed with irony and fear in Dumakude kaNdlovu's poem "Somebody is dead" (Van Wyk, Conradie and Constandaras, 1988:588-90). This is registered in the shift from the impersonal pronoun of the title and the first stanza, to the personal plural form adopted in the course of the second stanza:

> They were found hanging
> by torn blankets in their
> rafterless cells
> or slipped on a bar of soap
> while taking a shower
> in their bathroomless cells

The final shift in pronoun that occurs in the concluding lines signifies extreme distress at the lies and propaganda of the regime:

> We all committed
> suicide or were victims
> of hundreds of stray bullets
> or died of natural causes
> I said I do not know all I know we are dead

"I know fear", an early poem by James Matthews (Van Wyk, Conradie and Constandaras, 1988:513)[4], also records the vulnerability of activists, and an understandably obsessive preoccupation with the issue:

> I know death...
> and it will come in the shape
> of a slip on a stair or flight through air

Matthews' later poem "a slip on a stair" (1981:49) is quite different in that it mocks the laconic inquest reports:

> a slip on a stair
> a flight through the air
> those are the ways
> they say we take
> now, they found you a hanging
> a hanging in your cell
> another who went that way

In comparison to "I know fear", "a slip on a stair" registers progression from an immobilising dread to a much broader (and productive) conception of identity: an activist chooses to construct fellow victims not as isolated beings, as the state did, but as "we", signifying solidarity with those who have been decimated. The reference to the dead "you" who, the speaker relates, was found hanging, is deliberately nonchalant. Addressing the ultimate threat of the state, the poem advances a casual yet categoric denial of the regime of terror that such deaths were intended to inspire. In this way the poet signals a thorough-going refusal to accept the dominant terms of reality. This response can be contrasted to Dumakude kaNdlovu's conclusion in "Somebody is dead": defiant laughter can be truly liberating as it "overcomes fear, for it knows no inhibitions, no limitations" (Bakhtin, 1984:90).

"Petition to my Interrogators" (Van Wyk, Conradie and Constandaras 1988:622-3) is a witty poem in which Keith Gottschalk constructs a mock-obsequious voice of a detainee addressing his murderously-inclined security branch captors:

> i could always fall from a tenth-floor windowsill...
> but my friends know i'm a member of the mountain climbers club...
> of course, i could break my neck falling over a chair
> or hit my head against your office wall,
> but my family always complained i was stiff-necked,
> & my teachers all said i've got the thickest skull they'd ever seen,
> so who would that convince?

Since none of these excuses will convince the people who know him, the persona makes one more request:

> so perhaps
> (to save you all this inconvenience)
> why not just leave me alone?

Such a poem was not only an aggravation to the state and its security forces, but it could have helped activists confront their worst apprehensions in a positive manner. For the thousands who experienced such situations, such an attitude was part of their coping mechanisms as they dealt with post-traumatic stress (in the absence of more systematic treatment), and as they faced fresh threats and atrocities.

A poem that was read at many of the boycott meetings of the 1980s is Chris van Wyk's "In Detention" (1979:45), which suggests how the terror of deaths in detention could be deconstructed and disabled through discursive transgression. Showing how "laughter liberates from fear and intimidation" (Bakhtin, 1984:123), the poem purports to represent the voices of the state's servants, the better to expose them. Ostensibly about inconveniently dead prisoners, the lines are permutations of the explanations offered by the state's security police. The fourteen-line structure suggests the sonnet of English literature to any South African secondary schoolgoer. Such an audience would just as quickly realise that this poem is the very opposite of the sonnet. The refined discourse, the reasoned arguments, the harmonious flow of cadences, the elegant diction, and the ornate structure are replaced by a jumble of lame and hysterical excuses. The clipped initial verses offer the first clues, with the unconventional syntax confirming deviance. Compounding these irregularities are three sets

of gratuitous repetitions (the second line is repeated in the fourth line, the third line in the fifth line, and the first line in the sixth line). The repetitions emphasize (and critique by parody) the circuitous excuses offered for the many deaths in detention. The excessive repetition is also a tactic against the silencing that was the state's objective: "the excess of insistence must always be the lot of the marginal and displaced" (Ashcroft in Tiffin & Lawson, 1994:34). Such excess resists closure, particularly the kinds of closure the state sought to achieve through the twin mechanisms of the death in detention and the rigged inquest that followed.

In performance, it is the seventh and eighth lines that tend to evoke doubtful laughter, for these lines come too close to the circumstances of several well-known deaths in detention for an audience's response to be anything but equivocal. The ninth line allows for grim humour (were nine floors high enough for the security branch?). But the tenth line is too close to the official excuse to be funny. The remaining lines, which are absurd, deliver the audience unreservedly into the relief of laughter. It was not often that South Africans were able to laugh at the insanity of the apartheid regime.

He fell from the ninth floor
He hanged himself
He slipped on a piece of soap while washing
4 He hanged himself
He slipped on a piece of soap while washing
He fell from the ninth floor
He hanged himself while washing
8 He slipped from the ninth floor
He hung from the ninth floor
He slipped on the ninth floor while washing
He fell from a piece of soap while slipping
12 He hung from the ninth floor
He washed from the ninth floor while slipping
He hung from a piece of soap while washing

In performance the poem "In Detention" registers as farce or satire (depending on the level of reception). The parody of the sonnet form mocks the authority of the inquests that were uniformly supportive of the credibility of the state.

Much of the force of this poem derives from the unexpected but irrepressible humour that drives it. In a climate in which opposition to repression was outlawed, any resistance was perilous, and most people were intimidated into silence. Humour is a powerful resource in a culture of repression, enabling people to confront their worst fears and deconstruct the terror by which the state maintains power. It helps secure the participation of oppressed people who have been intimidated into silence. Few can resist the provocation of humour. Beginning with the refusal to be coerced into pessimism and tragedy, laughter constitutes the beginning of rebellion. Laughter challenges the culture of impunity, intimidation and violence, creating spaces for more life-affirming possibilities. Van Wyk's disruptive use of the idle, contemptuous statements of the security police draws on the opportunism of guerilla warfare. It would have been difficult for the repressive forces of authority to react without appearing ridiculous.

Humour and irony were also deployed by other poets against the murderous practices of the state. Peter Horn's "Canto Six: The Terrorists" (1991:111-2) addresses the practice of torture and the equivocation surrounding it. The title evokes the poem's creative redefinition of one of the most powerful nouns (besides "communist") that the apartheid state invoked against a range of people and organisations that challenged its right to domination. Horn uses irony to expose the distortion and equivocation that characterised the dominant discourse. The bankruptcy of the state's various excuses is rendered through the commonsense propositions used in the appeals. Given the medium, the targets of the poet are placed at a distinct disadvantage, particularly when they seem to be indulged. Such subterfuge has been critical to the guerilla warfare these poets conducted during the worst repression:

The Koevoet commando
which roasted the feet of three peasants
in the war zone near the river Kavango
said:
they intimidated us
with their menacing silence
about the hiding SWAPO insurgents.

Everybody can see
that the peaceful Kavango peasants
must be frightening terrorists:
as we all know
it is easy to confuse
the one who roasts a foot
with the one whose foot is roasted.

The interrogator
whose fists pounded Steve Biko's skull
until he lay unconscious on the floor
said:
I was frightened by his stubborn refusal
to divulge the names of his comrades.

Everybody can see
that Steve Biko was a terrorist:
as we all know
it is easy to confuse
the one who breaks a skull
with the one whose skull is broken.

The poem suggests that in situations of conflict no word is neutral and that no one enjoys a monopoly on the construction of meaning. By relocating the meaning of the highly loaded word "terrorist", the poem challenges the legitimacy of the holders of immense power in society:

Because we can all understand

the difference between
the terrorist and the terrorised,
we can all understand the need
to fight the terrorists
until our land is peaceful
and free.

One of the most striking features of these poems of Van Wyk, Horn, Matthews, Serote, Asvat, Gottschalk and Wa Mogale is the way they draw on the creativity inherent in everyday life as oppressed people dealt with the most difficult challenges of oppression:

> Popular creativity is concretely contextual. It exists not as an abstract ability as the bourgeois habitus conceives of artistic creativity: it is a creativity of practice... which is equally if not more productive in the practices of daily life (Fiske in Grossberg, Nelson and Treichler, 1992:158).

Through productive engagement with the appalling excuses made by the security forces for the frequent deaths of their captives the poets turned some of the lowest points of the liberation struggle into powerful and affirmative expressions of the literature of resistance.

9.2 Addressing the hangings of activists

As elsewhere in the world where capital punishment is practiced, a disproportionately high number of victims come from the most disempowered sections of society. The community-based Lamontville Drama Project developed the play *Sounds of the Condemned* in the late 1980s to highlight the impact of the numerous gallows in South Africa: in the Ciskei, the Transkei, the Venda, Pretoria, Rooigrond and Middeldrift. From 1979 to 1988, 157 people were hanged in the homelands alone, but Pretoria was "the number one state murderer, who killed 1 423 people", according to the activist Pax Magwaza, who was closely involved with *Sounds of the Condemned* (*Weekly Mail*, 17.11.89:27-8). Unrepresentative governments across South Africa were using the judicial process to dispose of more people (relative to population size) than anywhere in the world.

Ten ANC members were executed between 1979 and 1983. Solomon Mahlangu was the first ANC guerilla to be hanged for treason in April 1979. Mahlangu's fame survived his execution: many poems, and a college that the ANC set up in Tanzania pay tribute to him and celebrate the sacrifices made by the people who took up arms against the illegitimate state.

The message that Mahlangu left his mother shortly before he was executed focuses on the necessity to continue the struggle for liberation:

> Tell my people that I love them and that they must continue the struggle. Do not worry about me but about those who are suffering (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:34).

The ANC operative Sankie Nkondo drew upon Mahlangu's words when she wrote the poem "Solomon Mahlangu" (1990:29-30). She sustains and articulates Mahlangu's spirit in an evocative yet understated poem that challenges the minority regime's use of judicial processes to obliterate its political opponents:

> I offer my people echoes of happiness
> you who curfew your minds and with your backs to the prison wall
> cradle it until you stoop
> until it drills your chest
> until you bow to melt
> into broken pieces of hope
> bow to fate
> hold its quivering tale
> (to you I say)
> I touch this darkness and give it meaning.[5]

The tension between the powerful first and last lines suggests that, notwithstanding the annihilation that occurred during the struggle, the original meaning of the word "poet" was maker.

A character in the play *Asinamali!* (Ngema, 1985), invokes Mahlangu's name as happened in rallies and marches, signifying the tenacious quest for liberation. In the long poem "Hanged" (Plumpp, 1982:138-143) Dennis Brutus conveys the impact of Mahlangu's hanging on activists. The poem suggests the precarious fate of those who were resolved to struggle for liberation:

> All night
> his name
> his face
> his body
> his fate
> the cell
> the gallows
> pressed on my awareness
> like a nail
> hammered in my brain
>
> Solomon
> Mahlangu
>
> till dawn

till the time
till the news
the newspaper report

he had been hanged

then the nail
was pulled from my brain
and the drip
of tears inside my skull
began

Singing
he went
to war
and singing
he went
to his death

Like the singing on death row the night before a condemned person was hanged by the illegal state, the activist-poets created songs to accompany the struggle as it went through its worst phases. As Mahlangu himself had forseen, his death was not in vain, for it inspired others to continue to struggle for freedom.

Convicted of killing a policeman, Benjamin Moloise was hanged in October 1985. He contributed "Poem written on death row" (Ndaba, 1986:123), which clarifies the thinking of many activists who had to decide that the struggle was worth their sacrifice:

I am proud to be what I am,
The storm of oppression will be followed
By the rain of my blood.
I am proud to give my life,
My one solitary life.

9.3 Funerals

Given the increasing scale of repression in the mid-1980s the number of deaths attributable to the security forces escalated. Many people were shot by police during peaceful marches, or meetings, and this resulted in mass funerals for the victims, often attended by tens of thousands of people. Often mourners were "tear gassed, whipped, and dispersed - even killed" (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:133). Funerals became important occasions for mobilising against the state. But they were not just directed against the state. To counter the heavy losses of comrades, political funerals also involved an affirmation of the struggle: "an occasion for mourning has been turned into an occasion for affirmation and celebration, death transformed into an assertion of the will to survive" (Watts, 1989:253). The fortitude displayed in the poems about funerals is hard won, developing because of, rather than in spite of, the horror of experience.

Serote offers a consummate demonstration of the possibilities inherent in literature for addressing the material horror of daily life in *Behold Mama, Flowers!* (1978). But first, the hard-headed realism of James Matthews, who focused on disabusing oppressed South Africans of their situation, is apposite. Matthews raises a rhetorical challenge regarding the efficacy of literature in the slaughter house in the title of his poem "should i play the poet changing words into flowers" (1990:63). Serote demonstrates an awareness of this problem in the *Behold Mama, Flowers!* collection, where he reworks the symbol of flowers to challenge his audience to advance beyond the received conventions and constructions of reality. In the Foreword Serote explains the title of the collection:

> Listen, Skunder Boghossian says, once, a man chopped a body many, many times - he chopped this body into many, many small pieces and threw them into the flowing river. When the pieces, floating and flowing, began to dance with the rhythm of the river, a child, seeing this, said, "Mama, look at the flowers!" So says Skunder, my painter brother. I could if I like, call him my fisherman brother; ah, what is it that matters in this hour? I even forget whether he read or heard this story: Behold Mama, Flowers! (1978:8)

Serote experiments continuously with the medium, to ensure that it speaks to and of the oppressed community. Drawing on "flowers", one of the most hackneyed images in poetry, the collection knits the dichotomies of death and life, horror and beauty, fragmentation and cohesion, as it celebrates the possibility of fresh and creative responses to experience, notwithstanding the horror that has been endured. It is not insignificant that the speaker and visionary is a child: it was the youth in South Africa who, undaunted by history, fought for a liberated society.

The dismembered body in Boghossian's tale represents both the human sacrifices to apartheid, as well as the tiny, fragmented bantustans hacked from the minority superstate and forcibly severed from each other. Yoking the disparate iconography of blood and flowers, Serote renders the grim creativity of the liberation struggle:

> i can say, behold the flowers
> for their scent has taken other shapes (1978:60)

These lines displace the visual appeal of flowers, in favour of the more complex and subtle faculties of smell and touch, that living bodies possess. This confirms the poet's strategy of transmutation. While the poem assumes the stock representations of sweetness and hope that flowers generally carry, it does not gloss over the decimation that had already occurred or which was still to come, as the society began to descend into civil war: "Texts... have the capacity to pick up subterranean currents of thought that society itself may be unaware of" (Barber, 1987:4).

The acuity of Serote's vision as a poet and seer has been borne out in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings almost two decades after the poem was written. During 1985 the "PEBCO 3", Sipho Hashe, Champion Galela and Qaqawula Godolozi as well as other activists, among them Siphiwo Mthimkulu and Topsy Mdaka, were abducted. In May 1995 the death squad operative Joe Mamasela revealed that he and some security branch officers had tortured and killed the "PEBCO 3". In January 1997, a group of Eastern Cape security branch officers made an amnesty application to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in which they revealed that the burnt and dismembered bodies of Hashe, Galela, and Godolozi, as well as Mthimkulu, Mdaka and other Eastern Cape activists, had been dumped in the Fish River (SABC, 2.2.97). Serote's poem was written before 1978, almost eight years before these incidents. The passage of two decades between the occurrence and the confirmation of these particular death squad atrocities enables an estimation of the power of a poetry that claimed the future very assertively yet humanely. In going beyond the destructiveness of the regime, in which it was also trapped, poets and activists invoked a new order and affirmed new sets of human relationships.

Keith Gottschalk addresses the role of political funerals in his poem "The Assassination of Richard Turner" (Van Wyk, Conradie and Constandaras, 1988:624):

> Events
> have given us a new kind of political meeting
> the funeral.
>
> in these days
> our leaders of the future
> are all underground
>
> the graveyards have become a sort of parliament
> where our legislators-to-be
> assemble by the quorum.

The killings of activists inspired a number of poems for and about funerals, as well as a number of poet-performers. Mzwakhe Mbuli, who came to be known as "the people's poet" in the 1980s, began his career by chance at the funeral of Reverend Castro Mayathula in 1981, where he performed some of his poems to console his friends.

The scale of repression turned the funeral of many a victim of "unrest" into the only forum that was available to rally against the regime:

> Under repressive state restrictions funerals have become the settings for mass political rallies... as people grieve for the dead and renew their commitment to resist the government (Hill and Harris, 1989:72).

Many of the dead were civilians, including childen, who had died in street confrontations with the armed forces. Or, as the state tended to claim, many of the dead were victims of the "stray bullets" of the security forces. In "Stray Person" (*Cosaw Natal Journal* 1.1 1989:30) Thabo Thulo suggests that the phenomenon of stray bullets that found their way unerringly into so many black lives was consistent with an entire life filled with random events that just happened to originate with the apartheid state:

> The inquest found that no one was to be
> blamed for his death
> For the bullet that pierced his heart
> was a stray bullet.

As the repression worsened funerals offered the only public forums for the demonstration of solidarity with the struggle. Celebrating the sacrifices of fallen comrades, political funerals challenged the "unchanging established order and ideology, and stressed the element of change and renewal" (Bakhtin, 1984:81), as they represented the popular desire to bury oppression:

> The crowds participating in the funerals sing political songs and perform militant new dances, turning funerals themselves into remarkable forms of political and cultural expression (Hill and Harris, 1989:72).

Funerals proved to be surprisingly productive occasions for the expression of resistance, as *Asinamali* (1985) suggests through Bhoyi Ngema's animated description of the spectacle of popular defiance at the funeral of his friend and comrade Bhekani, who had been killed by "bullets from a passing [SADF] truck". The officiating priest concluded the service not with "Amen" (which signifies a resigned "so be it") but with "*Amandla*" (which carries the opposite meaning of "Power", a key slogan of the liberation organisations). "My mother couldn't believe it! My mother couldn't believe it!" he exclaims. This is a characteristically Bakhtinesque approach: the inappropriate behaviour of the priest, the narrator and the mother challenges the authoritarian prohibitions and commandments (Bakhtin, 1984:90) that were imposed by the state, which was itself responsible for Bhekani's death.

Under the states of emergency the only type of politically-related gathering permitted by the apartheid state was the funeral, although subject to strict delimitation and monitoring. The level of popular resistance expressed at the funerals led the authorities, in their re-imposition of the state of emergency in 1986, to place restrictions on "political funerals". Police authorisation of the time, date and place of a funeral was required. The funeral service was restricted to three hours. Public address systems, flags, posters and pamphlets were banned. Only ordained ministers were permitted to speak. No more than two hundred mourners were allowed, and the police maintained a high profile presence, to intimidate, disperse or arrest mourners (Hill and Harris, 1989:72). The activist Thami Mazwai's mother told the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (April 1996) that the police warned her that there were to be no

political songs at his funeral. The apartheid state seemed to be threatened by the power of oppressed voices in unison.

Nise Malange's "State of Emergency" (Evill and Kromberg, 1989: 24-5) is a translation from the Zulu original:

> Freedom songs are banned,
> Freedom clothes are banned,
> Freedom speeches are banned,
> They choose their own priests,
> State of Emergency.

Malange's defiance as an activist emerges in the form of address that is used. The speaker addresses the victim of political violence in terms that are at once personal and abstract, parodying the curt, peremptory voices of the officers of the state:

> Time is limited,
> Five minutes for a funeral
> Five minutes to bury you
> That's your funeral,
> State of Emergency.

Read as a couplet the last two lines express a desire for the destruction of the source of the problems, the state of emergency.

In the poem "After" (Oliphant, 1992:448) Keith Gottschalk mocks the fears that fed the state's reaction to the funerals of activists who had been killed by the security forces. The poem suggests that even in death the "enemies of the state" remain as much of a problem as they had been in life. The last six lines have echoes of the resurrection scene in *Woza Albert!* (1983). In these lines Gottschalk insists that the dead activists have not been completely annihilated. Like *Woza Albert!* (Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, 1983) the final line challenges activists to draw strength from the history of struggle:

> Throughout all graveyards of our land
> they proclaim states of emergency:
> they cordon off our dead with razor wire
> they order roadblocks to stop wakes
> they place our dead in solitary confinement
> they forbid our dead visitors.
> Should our dead rise
> they decree summary execution.
>
> They suspect our dead are only pretending....
> Their censors smash tombstones by night
> ban inscriptions, wreaths & requiems.
> Until, driven beyond endurance,
> even our dead hold underground meetings
> raise mounds of resistance

unearth alliances with the living:
guerilla a way to the light.

In our epoch the dead unite with the living (1992:448)

Some of the people killed by the security forces were members of *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, which signalled a new, armed dimension to resistance. In July 1987 young Ashley Kriel, the western Cape commander of *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, was stalked and shot at point-blank range in the back by police in a Western Cape township. The nature of the killing contradicted police claims that they shot Kriel in self-defence. Other activists and sympathisers were determined to bury Kriel as a hero and a martyr despite the emergency regulations. In Keith Gottschalk's poem "For Ashley Kriel whom they killed by Hazendal"[6] the ordinariness of heroism is a powerful theme, with Kriel's life serving as the archetype:

Our movement is moved to action by your dying:
when they handcuffed you, beat you,
threw you out of the door face down,
shot you in the back -
the killing of a comrade means much work.

Gottschalk counters the state's attempts to alienate activists from the broader community by comparing their struggle to bury Kriel with Antigone's rejection of the ruler Creon's injunction that her brother remain unburied:

This day, and under a sky crying rain
do we commit your body to the earth:
you, no longer child, now returned.

Of course they gas us,
try to seize our flag,
video the graveside crowds
so identikits can guide their hunters.
But the buffels, hippos, ratels,
circling, predatory, we defeated:

for we buried our brother.

Given the oppressive emergency regulations, the funeral preparations were of heroic proportions, symbolising the scale of defiance, although the poet expresses this by way of counterpoint, in a matter-of-fact recitation of the logistics:

BISCO, CAYCO, UDF scramble:
soup, bread, cooking oil
for comrades coming to the wake;
posters, 200 000 pamphlets
distributed by sunrise at six stations;
donations, marshals, the vigil,
the bus collecting mourners leaving Cape Town;

so many details;
& lawyers briefed.

Gottschalk, a University of Western Cape academic, distributed copies of the poem on campus. The poem found an unanticipated audience in the apartheid parliament, through the unwitting agency of the indignant Minister of Police, Adriaan Vlok. Vlok wondered, rhetorically, if the poem constituted part of the struggle: "I should like to know where this man, Keith Gottschalk, stands regarding these matters. Does he support this terrorist or what is he really involved in here?"[7] Although it is doubtful that the specific implications of the discursive form had much meaning for Vlok, his faulty recognition of the discourse showed a better grasp of its role in the liberation struggle than the conservative liberal intelligentsia.

Between Ashley Kriel's death and the poem's airing in parliament, another prominent young activist, Caiphus Nyoka was killed. The police burst into his parents' Daveyton home early one morning in August 1987 and shot him with impunity at close range in the forehead, neck and chest. The killings of Nyoka and Kriel were part of the security forces' "total onslaught" against the resistance.

Despite the scale of the killings, a surprising optimism characterised the literature, and corresponded with the spirit of the struggle against the state. Many resistance poets insisted on reinterpreting the meaning of the state sponsored killings that swept the country. Much of the literature, like "Flames of Fury" (1990:9-11) by Sankie Nkondo, insisted that liberation would yet develop out of the decimation:

but comrade this is no cremation
only the birth of our future

9.4 Militance

arm me with a gun
that spurts consciousness (Dikeni, 1992:31-3).

Resistance poetry is provocative, defiant, confrontational - a call to... the oppressed themselves to action (Owomoyela, 1993:131).

How does one use English as a site of struggle (Gwala, 1989:72).

Violence has been a characteristic of South African society. Apart from the structural violence of the apartheid regime's policies on franchise, settlement, housing, labour, education and freedom of expression, there was the violence of the army and the police. From the mid-1970s until 1990 South Africa was in a semi-revolutionary state. The political assertiveness of most of the writers arose in response to the intransigence of the state. Writers like Serote, Gwala and Horn used literature as a political and a politicized activity to articulate the popular militance that was part of the escalating political tensions. Many writers drew on Mandela's address from the dock during the Rivonia trial where he called for action against the apartheid regime, and did not exclude the military option.

Serote challenged the state's propaganda about the character of resistance in "The Growing" (1972:21), which uses a teacher/gardener to suggest nurturance rather than destruction. The poem begins with a firm refutation:

> No!
> This is not dying

This is followed by strong affirmations:

> Yes,
> This is teaching about the growing of things:
> If you crowd me I'll retreat from you,
> If you crowd me I'll think a bit,
> Not about crowding you but about your right to crowd me;
> If you still crowd me, I will not, but I will be thinking
> About crowding you

Drawing on the benign image of a garden the poet sets about changing the dominant constructions of black resistance. The imagery in the concluding lines suggest that the protests, strikes and other anti-government mobilization are not destructive but necessary to the development of society:

> So if I say prune instead of cut,
> I'm teaching about the growing of things.

A later poem of Serote's, *No Baby Must Weep* (1975:37), addresses the oppressors directly. It carries the kind of ringing pledge that fuelled the armed resistance of the Azanian People's Liberation Army (of the Azanian Peoples' Organisation), Umkhonto we Sizwe, and POQO (of the Pan Africanist Congress):

> this won't be your world
> i am the man you will never defeat

The difference between the last two poems may reflect the impact of the 1975 United Nations General Assembly endorsement of

> the legitimacy of the struggle of the oppressed people of South Africa and their liberation movements, by all possible means, for the seizure of power by the people (Asmal, Asmal and Roberts, 1996:184).

Such a spirit is even more apparent in the section headed "we choose the weapons" in the poem "from Song of Experience" (1978:75-8), where Serote uses personification to address the alternative to the turmoil of irresolution:

> on these banks death is alive
> it strides like a man who can't make decisions
> who is orphaned from joy and peace

The decision to act in itself reduces some of the psychological stress:

> we chose the weapons now
> either we live or we die
> how could we have existed for so long

There is a simile in a later stanza that constructs the militant preparations of the cadres as being natural and life-sustaining:

> we choose the weapons now
> like fathers and mothers we can build a day

The concluding stanza asserts the closure that the armed struggle will bring to centuries of struggle against oppression:

> the time is here
> we choose the weapons now
> so we erase the day we never intended to see

Although there was little doubt about their right to struggle, few poems are explicitly revolutionary. The snatches of revolt in the following poems suggest the impact of the repression and censorship. In "Modes of Introits from Familiar Sights" (1978:85-86) Serote rationalises the destruction and losses that have been sustained:

> we have seen what we have seen
> because nobody ever chooses defeat

The third part of the poem works reflexively to articulate the grim tasks that the polarisation of apartheid has produced:

> our lives will have to take other lives as we define ours
> yes
> we shall have to be eloquent about that

Like Serote, Peter Horn in "Hurricane in a splintering skull" (1974:31-2) addresses the war that the state declared on citizens and clarifies the choices before activists and writers:

This is the language of the hurricane. The violence
of life reborn. We haul the flags down
and set them at halfmast

Ingoapele Madingoane's performance poem *africa my beginning* (1979:32) locates the struggle within a history of anticolonial resistance and concludes with an unambiguous declaration to

join the masses that went before me
and as one we shall fight
the ancestral war until justice
is done

"The Voiceless Ones" by Fanyana Mazibuko (Couzens and Patel, 1982:295) examines the repression of workers:

In silence they have laboured,
Even to the bowels of the earth

Drawing on the images of mining, the conclusion alludes to the inevitable effect of repression:

Without a warning or safety valve -
Doomed only to explode.

In "The ABC Jig" (1982:75-76) Mafika Gwala addresses the inevitable outcome of centuries of pain and humiliation, suggesting that the oppressors must take responsibility for their actions:

By assaulting us
they were teaching us to hate;
By insulting us
they were telling us never
to turn the other cheek.

Wally Serote's prophetic "Time Has Run Out" (1982b:125-134) suggests how the violence of apartheid contributed to popular resistance, which increasingly meant war:

guns and grenades are popping blue flames in our country
old relations are being erased
our hands are soaked in blood
please, do not anyone, ask us to wipe them or wash them
we learnt by losing children and dying terrible deaths
how to hold a gun and a grenade
we know now
how to make fire fire fire (1982b:132)

The poem clarifies the history of suffering that bolstered the aggression of the oppressed: people chose liberation, and they struggled to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to end their misery. The full version of "Time Has Run Out" is in *The Night Keeps Winking* (1982a), which was banned. This version has lines that challenge the state's condemnation of the armed struggle:

> You cannot kill
> children like cattle and then hope that guns are a monopoly (1982a:5)

Undeterred by the consequences of struggle, the speaker concludes combatively:

> We must now claim our land, even if we die in the process.
> Our history is a culture of resistance (1982a:6).

Serote's poem "Modes of Introits from Familiar Sights" (1978:85-86) challenges the absence of basic rights. The lines justifying the militance of ordinary people echo Serote's own sense of dispossession during his exile in Botswana:

> to have a home is not a favour
> we do know that
> so we shall define exile as an assault
> and we can never be nice about claiming a home

"The Breezing Dawn of the New Day" (1982b:138-141) by Serote has a prose-like formulation that expresses popular recognition that action had to be taken to eliminate oppression:

> nothing stays forever, even our oppression or
> our oppressor. and we know it is us who must
> make this true (1982b:140).

The poem uses inspirational rhetoric to oppose the apartheid propaganda that saturated the media and education:

> our country needs us to fight; and then we find
> out that we are ready, all this time, of having
> nothing, has prepared us, which is to pitch the
> price of our country at the height of our life - nothing less.
> who, we ask, does not know our story
> the story of our country (1982b:140).

The curses towards the end of the poem render the desperation and the wishful thinking of people who have struggled for a long time:

> and day by day one by one we will come
> and the new paths will be started
> and the old will turn to chaos
> the house of law will turn mute

the house of reigns will turn limp
and their security will go blind (1982b:140)

By contrast, in Serote's "Time has run out" (1982b:125-134) a militant optimism is the result of sacrifice and struggle:

we know
our morning is coming
the morning after this hour
this night
is coming -
many of us are dead
some of us are traitors
some in this hour betray us and they are black
we move
our will as stubborn as time

our eye as vigilant as the sun or the moon
we move
creating blue flames
and knowing a new day must come! (1982b:133-134)

On the other hand, James Matthews' poem "we shall not let our death" (1981:23) has an apocalyptic view of the sacrifices necessary to produce a new order:

the land must be washed in blood
so that a new crop of us will sprout

In "Canto Three" (1991:106-7) Peter Horn also deals with the bloody history of oppression through the image of waves of marchers advancing despite (and because of) decimation. Horn celebrates the spirit of anti-colonial resistance by drawing on the myths of invincibility that arose in the Ugandan and Zimbabwean struggles for liberation:

For there is nothing stronger than this perishable flesh,
when it walks, singing towards the weapons of death.
And you walk, you are dead, but you walk:
and your mutilated bodies create terror
among the ruling class.

Holding destruction and reconstruction in tension Serote envisions the society that will be created out of war in *A Tough Tale* (1987:43):

you and I will build peace here
shaped by corpses cut by raging bullets and thunderous bombs
of mad men
killing workers, students, women, children mercilessly for their greed

Aware that the security forces were targetting prominent figures in the liberation movement (like Steve Biko), Serote urged the necessity for active popular resistance in "Child of the Song" (1978:79-80). The shift in tense in the last line wills into being the capacity to sustain setbacks:

> prophets claim the future
> and the present destroys them
>
> so
> child of the song, sing don't cry
> with song and dance we defied death

Given the imperative of liberation, the "paramount value" of black poetry in English "was neither ontological nor formal but strategic" (McClintock 1987:249). This tended to apply to the resistance drama as well, for instance at the end of *Asinamali* (1985) the prisoners sing the following words in Zulu:

> Even though they shoot us, arrest us, kill us
> We'll just march on.

The concerns, antipathies and contradictions embodied in the use of violence explain the frequency with which mythmaking accompanies the expressions of militance. Although modest in form, most of the myth-making of the 1970s and the 1980s was of a sophisticated order. The disclaimer in Zinjiva Winston Nkondo's poem "The Long Road: The Tunnel" (1990:10-18) counters the dominant myths:

> all the tales told here
> are tales against myths
> real people reliving real people (1990:16)

The image of a child (a conventional symbol of the future) predominates in a range of poems addressing the inevitability of liberation. A section of the poem "it is night" (1981:26) by James Matthews acknowledges the critical role of the youth in the struggle:

> the children will greet the dawn
> with a fire of their own

Daniel P. Kunene's "Do not ask me" (Couzens and Patel, 1982:403-4) also celebrates the militance of the schoolchildren in 1976, suggesting parallels between those who had to go into exile and the mythical *amasi* bird that was the bringer of sustenance:

> the children raised their fists
> and shouted:
> *Amasi! Amasi!* We demand the *amasi* bird!
> *Amandla! Amandla! Ngawethu!*

By the mid-1980s the political situation had worsened considerably. The state failed to meet national political demands, and it was unable to deal with the problems in education, housing

and unemployment. Millions of people, and especially the youth, were politicised during this period. Grassroots organisations developed in response to people's everyday problems and grew rapidly, and credible black leaders emerged nationally. The state lost all initiative besides the reflex of repression. It reacted particularly harshly to all democratic opposition, as Johan Muller observes:

> obviously a democratic objective is a revolutionary threat to apartheid. But in most other contexts, preparation for democratic participation is a precondition for political stability - the antithesis of revolution (Levin, 1991:125).

There was countrywide resistance. Most of the townships, notably Alexandra, Sharpeville, Sebokeng, Boipatong, Tembisa, Tumahole and Uitenhage were involved. In *Asinamali* (Ngema, 1985) Solomzi Bisholo recalls, with youthful excitement, an episode of the civil war when heavily armed troops tried to take control of Sebokeng. The residents resisted and there was a battle:

> And then there was the fire. And then there were the people, a stone in one hand, a dust-bin lid in the other. And then there was the teargas. And then there was the policemen in camouflage uniform. And then there was the rattling sound of machine gun fire. Windows were falling, glass was flying. And then there were the screams. And then there were the shouts. Some of us were left lying on the ground. Forward! Don't be afraid.

The state used reports of stone-throwing in the townships to justify attacks by heavily armed troops on otherwise unarmed citizens. Activists like Mzwakhe Mbuli were incensed at the propaganda regarding the crude weapons that unarmed residents tended to use, either in defiance or as a last resort against the troops. In "Let me Remember" (1989:63-4) Mbuli mocked the state's allegations:

> Let me remember a day;
> Whereby a man of eighty was labelled a stone thrower;
> Let me remember a day;
> Whereby a child of three was labelled a stone thrower;
> Let me remember a day;
> Whereby an old blind woman was labelled a stone thrower

This contrasts with Solomzi Bisholo's animated account of how a young neighbour saved his life during the battle in Sebokeng:

> when I turned the corner I was face to face with a white policeman. Just as he was setting the machine gun, a schoolgirl threw a brick on his back - which left me paralysed and shocked. The boer boy was firing up to heaven as he went down. I swear he wished Pretoria had taught him how to use stones. Stones, rocks, matches, tyres: in two minutes he was on fire. I ran away.

The surprising transpositions and the tribute to the scholar contrast with the defiance expressed in these extracts. The militance is linked to the frustration over the unequal battles that were fought in the townships and in the media. The casual reference to the necklacing of

the soldier seems to be in retaliation for the disregard that the state, its armies and media displayed towards black lives.

Necklacing was usually used against suspected collaborators by people frustrated by the absence of justice and outraged at the impact that informers had on the struggles of their communities. Hundreds of township residents were necklaced between September 1984 and 1989 under suspicion of being security force collaborators. The journalist Max du Preez in a Truth Commission report (SABC, 3.2.97) put the figure at 771 people. While the figure seems high it reflects the level of fear and suspicion of betrayal among "comrades" and other township residents. In the deteriorating conditions in the townships, suspected informers tended to be summarily killed. The reasons for this are varied: they were the most accessible representatives of the regime, their deaths served to deter others tempted to collaborate with the regime, there was the rationale of "it was either them or us", or there was no recourse to any formal system of justice.[8]

In *Asinamali* (Ngema, 1985) the character Bhoyi Ngema recounts how a Lamontville community's outrage at the death of another comrade by a "stray bullet" drove people to disinter and parade the body of a dead collaborator, warning their enemies that not even death would save them from a terrible vengeance:

> Bhekani was killed - bullets from a passing police truck .... But after that the people got mad. Dug up the informer and took his corpse down to his wife and children. He was resurrected, like Christ.

Given the polarisation of society, most resisting communities tended to isolate collaborators, community councillors and policemen. *Asinamali* (Ngema, 1985) challenged its audience on the issue of informers. In one of his narratives about Msizi Dube, Bhoyi Ngema asserts: "Informers killed him [Dube]. Catch the informer [pointing at the audience]." He goes on to assert that the problem with informers and collaborators was "not only the problem of Lamontville but the problem of the whole of South Africa". In this scene *Asinamali* demonstrates that its principal purpose (like *Woza Albert!*) was to challenge its audience to actively resist the apartheid state.

The states of emergency smothered the open rebellion that erupted in the townships between September 1984 and May 1986 (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:132). Although the rebellion was driven underground, the enforced silence did not mean that the struggle was crushed: "The superficial calm of Casspirs and censorship is not a sign of peace.... It is the enforced silence of people under occupation" (Wilson and Ramphele, 1989:5-6). Through the use of personification in "Canto Two: Silence Silence!" (1991:105) Peter Horn confirms this:

> The silence incites a schoolboy to boycott his school.
> The silence incites a worker to down his tools...
> The silence marches through Adderley Street,
> a long procession of silenced comrades...
> The silence discourages young soldiers to take up their guns.
> The silence sits down on the steps of parliament and waits.
> The silence... hastens the retreat of foreign capital.
> The silence makes the rand fall from cent to cent.

Silence creates manifold rumours whispering in corners...
The silence promotes the aims of the ANC and the UDF.
The silence is subversive.

Arrest silence!
Silence silence!

As the national crisis escalated during the 1980s, scores of activists went missing and were presumed to have been killed by the security forces (and its death squads). Like Serote in "Child of the Song" (1978:79-80), Alfred Temba Qabula threatens the security forces in the poem "Death" (1986:23-27) by means of a shift in tense:

if only we could see you
you would have already
been slain

Nise Malange's long poem "Today" (1986:64-66) also develops the idea of reprisal. Malange's poem celebrates a sense of community, despite the deaths caused by the repressive state. Performed at the trade union federation FOSATU's culture day in June 1985, "Today" registers the enormous anger and frustration that many activists felt, and enacts the fantasies that enabled them to endure. That the revenge fantasies require the demise of the opponents suggests the level of powerlessness that was felt. However, such fantasies also suggest that despite the repression activists still anticipated retaliation. Through her speaker's conjecture that the dead (slain?) oppressors would be denied repentance, Malange warns that they are beyond redemption.

Gcina Mhlope's exhortatory poem "We are at war" (Brown, Hofmeyr and Rosenberg, 1983:159-160) reminds her audience that "a woman's place in the struggle" (a slogan used in the 1980s):

Women of my country
Young and old
Black and white
we are at war
The winds are blowing
against us
Laws are ruling against us
We are at war
But do not despair
We are the winning type
Let us fight on
Forward ever
Backward never

In 1985 on Women's Day, which the ANC celebrated on 9 August (after the 1956 women's defiance campaign against the legislation compelling African women to carry passes), the ANC Women's League called on women to take up arms against the enemy. Cadres who had

already joined *Umkhonto we Sizwe* by then included Thandi Modise, Thenjiwe Mtintso and Jackie Sedibe.[9]

Nise Malange, who moved from being a union organiser to a coordinator of worker culture in Durban, wrote "Long Live Women" (1989:20-1) which contends that since women are subject to political oppression they have no reason not to participate in the struggle:

> Because we are women we cannot allow exploitation.
>
> We cannot fold our arms and pray whilst our country
> is in a state of collapsing
> We cannot sit behind whilst our kids, brothers and
> sisters are dying in the streets.
> Whilst our mothers are sentenced to long term imprisonment.
> Whilst they are charged for treason.
> Whilst they are brutally killed by cowards.
> Whilst countrywide we are fed with propaganda.
>
> Probably all the meetings and organisations
> Will be silenced and my voice will not reach you:
> It does not matter
>
> You will continue to hear me, I will always be beside you,
> And my memory will always be loyal to you,
> And we will overcome this grey and bitter moment where our
> Mothers and sisters are buried.
>
> Let's stand up and fight!

These poems attest to the validity of Cabral's argument that under conditions of struggle "culture is a method of group mobilization, even a weapon in the fight for independence" (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1979:206).

Peter Horn's ironically-titled "Enter the fold" (1991:76-7) is directed at the Christian nationalist state and contends that the enclave of resistance must disarticulate the lexicon of the dominant:

> let us invent words to corrode fences
> and to create deeds: like loving eating
> striking shooting undressing thinking burying
> let us spit out the words that choke us:
> nine to five thoughtless grind exploitation
> army nigger kaffir coolie shoot the bastards

Lesego Rampolokeng's "rap 39" (1990:64-5) carries the impatience and directness of youth in its rejection of the necessity for diplomacy. Brusquely rejecting the history of oppression Rampolokeng renders the impatience and urgency of the youth:

i want no four hundred years
of humanity's tears

Familiar with the work of Garvey, Du Bois, Malcolm X, Cabral, Neto and Fanon, Rampolokeng contextualises the struggle in South Africa as being in solidarity with the struggles of oppressed people across the world. He uses the heroic formulae of the *izibongo* to articulate militance:

i ring the war bell
to drive them back to hell

Of the same generation as Rampolokeng, Sandile Dikeni's rhythmic "Guava Juice" (1992:22) is also defiant and aggressive as it exhorts the comrades to attack the security forces ("dogs"):

dance dance my hero
dance around the fire of resistance
dance at the success of your throw
dance because the dogs are still at a distance
dance for that guava juice

make make my young lion
make another guava juice

make another one as strong as iron
make many more until they beg for a truce
make those many guava juices

Zinjiva Winston Nkondo's "The Tunnel Revisted" suggests that, given the crisis, action transcends theories of morality:

the spear
that we must hold and groom
beyond concepts
(1990:27)

Besides being a traditional instrument of war, the image of the spear recalls *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, which is the Zulu for spear of the nation. Perhaps the conclusion to this line of reasoning is to be found in Wally Serote's poem *A Tough Tale* (1987:29):

we have told our tale
in blood

The final section of Serote's wide-ranging "Modes of Introits from Familiar Sights" (1978:85-86) urges black intellectuals to become involved before the situation deteriorates:

where politics is rules for a game called genocide
my brother
it is evil to be ignorant

it is evil to walk without looking back
we must know we have only one life
it cannot be wasted in thirst, or, death can be a way of saying
things.

Mafika Gwala challenged the meaning of the adjective "poetic" in his ironically-titled poem "In defence of poetry" (1982:10), which parodies a long history of essays on the topic. Foregrounding the fact that his challenge issues from his subject position as a poet and an oppressed person, Gwala is very pessimistic about the significance of poetry in the South African context:

What's poetic
about Defence Bonds and Armscor?
What's poetic
about long-term sentences and
deaths in detention
for those who "threaten state security"?
Tell me
What's poetic
about shooting defenceless kids
in a Soweto street?

Seitlhamo Motsapi's "The Blood Of Poetry" (*Staffrider*, 9.2 1990:72) shows the increasing militance in poets and their poems:

These poems have memories too
and remember very well
the murders of our mothers and brothers

The multiple dislocations (social, psychological, cultural, geographical) caused by apartheid explain the bleak conclusion regarding literature in Zinjiva Winston Nkondo's poem "This is how the centuries went" (1990:29-39):

oh hell
so this is how the centuries went
and when eyes began to focus
prison walls were strengthened
with nuclear war-heads and rhetoric
I say once more
there is no poetry here

Nkondo suggests that, in a deformed society literature could not just reflect the approaches and styles of societies with a history of democracy. These contentions were addressed by Mothobi Mutloatse, the chair of the nonracial PEN writer's organisation before it collapsed after the polarisation that resulted from the Soweto crisis. Mutloatse edited *Forced Landing!* (1980) and produced a combative writer's manifesto that made an enormous impact on local literary circles, as much for what it said as how it was said:

> We will have to *donder* conventional literature: old-fashioned critic and reader alike. We are going to pee, spit and shit on literary convention before we are through; we are going to have to kick and pull and push and drag literature into the form we prefer. We are going to experiment and probe and not give a damn what the critics have to say. Because we are in search of our true selves - undergoing self-discovery as a people.
>
> We are not going to be told how to re-live our feelings, pains and aspirations by anybody who speaks from the platform of his own rickety culture. We'll write our poems in narrative form; we'll write journalistic pieces in poetry form; we'll dramatise our poetic experiences; we'll poeticise our historical dramas (1980:5).

For Mutloatse the political struggle was continuous with the struggle of the resistance writer, a point that was not missed on the censors who banned the text. Mutloatse tended to see the conservative liberals, the subject of his tirade, as being little different from the regime. While the issue was more complex, the militance that drives Mutloatse's assertions show an impatience with the attempt to seal off the arts from the struggle.

In the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands more than 2000 people died between September 1987 and 1990 (a toll that in the first 18 months alone exceeded that of 20 years of fighting in Northern Ireland). The security forces and the dominant media used the word unrest (from the Afrikaans "onrus"), which obscures and trivialises the political violence that was occurring between Inkatha and the United Democratic Front/Congress of South African Trade Unions alliance. The word suggests the perennial "native discontent" that the security forces had always "brought under control". The "liberal" press and the government-supporting media treated the violence as tribal feuding or "black-on-black" violence. Such constructs distanced and diminished the issue. It took a long time for the validity of the term "war" to be recognised:

> Calling it a war has less to do with semantic precision than with one's political and cultural position ... when there is a real, live war like the one in Pietermaritzburg, whites don't recognise it. Like so much else pertaining to blacks in South Africa, it's invisible to them (Kentridge, 1990:14-17).

The "militant" language of the Pietermaritzburg poet Mlungisi Mkhize in "Come After the Thunder" (*COSAW Natal Journal*, 1.1 1989:5) was intended to serve as a corrective in a dissembling context:

> They came to me asking...
> Asking why I am so rough-toned
> When singing songs
>
> I said,
> Oh if we survive
> From the coming thunder
> Come when it has come
> And gone - come!

Come search
For a new clean voice
Void of fury

Of more concern to Mkhize than the conservative liberals' disapproval of "rough-toned songs" was the threatening conduct of the state. In "Just before embracing dawn" (Evill and Kromberg, 1989:26-7), which deals with a SADF raid on his home, Mkhize wrote about the necessity for the committed poet never to be deterred from his vocation:

And when the tool of flames
Pointed at me, threats unfounded
My writings keenly scrutinised,
New strength pervaded my whole being.

So give me pen and paper
I will write
Verses in the midst of torture.

Mkhize's determination to resist the brutality of the state, both in his activism and in his writing finds echoes in a range of texts, such as the "AK-47 Song" that was sung at political funerals in defiance of prohibitions and an intimidatory military presence. This reinforces Amilcar Cabral's argument that "the struggle for liberation is above all else an act of culture" (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1979:210). Mkhize, the trade unionist Jabu Ndlovu, and several worker/cultural activists from the Mphophomeni area were killed in the war.

James Matthews was aware of the relentless movement towards armed struggle, and the attendant loss of innocence, which he addresses through the persona of a seer in "the tomorrows that are to" from *Poisoned Wells* (1990:26):

the tomorrows that are to
be
are not fashioned out of
dreams
they are crystallised in the
deaths
inflicted upon our flesh each
day

Matthews' conclusion recognises the price of liberation, recording how far communities across the country travelled from innocence in the struggle for survival and freedom:

our strength comes from poisoned
wells

9.5 Self-criticism

Karin Barber cites Pierre Bourdieu's statement to the effect that a liberation struggle, however justified, is not a magical phenomenon protected from examination (1987:6). Self-criticism is important to the development of an organisation, a struggle, and a society, if these are to become more effective. The capacity for self-criticism is an indicator of the capacity to develop and transform. It is an indication of the difference between the incipient structure and the dominant. A culture of self-criticism keeps in check undemocratic practices and intolerance. While it is not easy for liberation organisations to practice self-criticism, particularly when the organs of the dominant seek to undermine or destroy them, this remains a critical factor in the development of a strong counter-hegemony.

Literature offered a viable location for the expression of criticism of the resistance struggle. Given the imbalances in South African society there was always the chance that the analyses would either be decontextualised or that they would tend to overcompensate for shortcomings. Nevertheless, there has been a connection between the proximity of writers to the struggle and the depth of their critique. While addressing the issues of oppression and transformation, many writers and performers questioned their own contradictions and the limitations of their speaking positions.

In his poetry Serote demonstrates a willingness to examine some of the contradictions engendered by apartheid society, and he does so with candour. An early poem, "Waking Up. The Sun. The Body." (1972:35-36), addresses the pathological effects of oppression on the psyche, suggesting that liberation is not achieved without a struggle against the easier option of hatred:

> For what do you do when, again and again,
> Things around you and in you beg you with a painful embrace to hate,
> And you respond with a rage and you know,
> That you can never hate.

In a society given to extremes the converse is as much of a problem. Serote's speaker in "That's Not My Wish" (1972:41) shows the contrary impulses of social and political propriety:

> To talk for myself,
> I hate to hate,
> But how often has it been
> I could not hate enough.

An ambivalent but playful self-criticism is expressed in Serote's "Anonymous Throbs + A Dream" (1982b:69-70). The amusement that the image of the obsequious dog evokes is intended, in a wry, reflexive twist, to shame and sensitise the reader into recognising all the inadequacies of response there have been to the hegemonizing power of the dominant:

> I did this world great wrong
> with my kindness of a dog

my heart like a dog's tongue
licking too many hands, boots and bums
even after they kicked my arse
voetsek voetsek
shit. I still wagged my tail
I ran away still looking back
with eyes saying please

The converse response to apartheid is expressed in the lines "but how can i forgive/ but how can i forgive" in "Behold Mama, Flowers" (1978:18). Both poems suggest the need for the rejection of the depredations of apartheid. The level of self-confrontation that occurs in these poems may, to a large extent, be attributed to the genre.

"A poem on Black and White" (1982b:55), which first appeared in Serote's collection *Tsetlo*, seeks to initiate dialogue to address the phenomenon of inter-racial hatred and its consequences. Ironically, the collection was banned. The poem begins by pointing out that the oppressor does not enjoy any monopoly on terror, for the oppressed also possess a capacity for retaliation:

If I pour petrol on a white child's face
and give flames the taste of his flesh
it won't be a new thing
i wonder how i will feel when his eyes pop
and when my nostrils sip the smell of his flesh
and his scream touches my heart
i wonder if i will be able to sleep;
i understand alas i do understand
the rage of a whiteman pouring petrol on a black child's face
setting it alight and shooting him in a Pretoria street

In his articulation of subaltern rage the poet suggests that despite centuries of systematic dehumanisation the oppressed as a whole retain possession of a greater humanity than most privileged South Africans have demonstrated. Part of the intent of the poem is to address those (particularly the intellectuals of both groups) who would pretend that the poison of the system had somehow passed them by. This is evident in the opening lines, in the tone of appraisal which parodies the rational, dispassionate and speculative discourse that failed to deal with such issues. The clinical style is used to question whether such subjects, which have been part of the daily experiences of oppressed people for centuries, can be encoded in academic or literary discourses that avoid engaging with the political context.

A range of resistance writers have expressed deep concern for people who participate in their own exploitation and degradation. Mafika Gwala is very critical of the behaviour of oppressed people who destroy each other's lives, and particularly the lives of those weaker than themselves. In "Gumba, Gumba, Gumba" (Royston,1973:53-5) Gwala suggests that the social breakdown that occurred is no less destructive than the machinations of the state:

You seen struggle.
If you heard:

Heard a man bugger a woman, old as his mother;
Heard a child giggle at obscene jokes
Heard a mother weep over a dead son

Addressing a similar problem, Serote's "Time Has Run Out" (1982b:131-132) is compelling as critique because it takes a shared sense of responsibility as its starting point:

remember
the cruel things we did to each other where, mad we killed each other
in styles that made the sun or moon blink in awe

The poet will not gloss over the social problems:

inside this hour
many of us have gone mad
some killed with their bare fingers
some soaked their hearts in alcohol forever

Serote's poem "My Brothers in the Streets" (1972:27) draws its critical power from the deep sense of community that accompanies its reproval of the behaviour of *tsotsis* (young township gangsters). Addressing the *tsotsis* directly, the speaker uses repetition to emphasise the criminal behaviour against fellow township residents. The critique is interrupted twice when the vocative case is used in expressions that anticipate the final appeal to fraternity and community. The inverted praise form that is used emphasizes the depth of the criticism, while reinforcing the authority of the censure:

My brothers in the streets,
Who holiday in jails,
Who rest in hospitals,
Who smile at insults,
Who fear the whites,
Oh you black boys,
You horde-waters that sweep over black pastures,
You bloody bodies that dodge bullets,
My brothers in the streets,
Who booze and listen to records,
Who've tasted rape of mothers and sisters,
Who take alms from white hands.
Who grab bread from black mouths,
Oh you black boys,
Who spill blood as easy as saying "Voetsek"
Listen!
Come my black brothers in the streets,
Listen,
It's black women who are crying.

Serote's poetic techniques connect the social role of black intellectuals to the social functions of the *izimbongi* of the oral tradition. Serote writes didactically for an audience of fellow

black intellectuals, who may be moved to take responsibility for improving their communities. The intimate expressions of solidarity in the poem are not just rhetorical devices but constitutive of political unity and action, given the divisions that apartheid sought to engender among the oppressed. Such poetry denotes the progressive character of the resistance struggle.

The response of another township resident to the actions of *tsotsis* is raised in Oswald Mtshali's poem "Just a Passerby" (1971:56):

> I saw them clobber him with *kieries*
> I heard him scream with pain
> like a victim of slaughter;
> I smelt fresh blood gush
> from his nostrils,
> and flow on the street.
>
> I walked into the church,
> and knelt in the pew
> "Lord! I love you,
> I also love my neighbour. Amen."

While the speaker registers the victim's suffering, his only response is the avoidance of responsibility through prayer. The final stanza renders the speaker's discovery that the victim is his brother. Through the narrative Mtshali criticises the defensive and hypocritical use of religious platitudes as a substitute for appropriate action. There is also criticism of the unquestioning adoption of the meek individualism that opportunistic apartheid-linked churches encouraged in unsuspecting black parishioners.

The consequences of the alienation of oppressed communities from each other is also addressed by Mtutuzeli Matshoba in "To Kill a Man's Pride" (Mutloatse, 1980:103-127), which analyses the thoughtless complicity of township dwellers in the apartheid divisions that the state had sown between themselves and hostel dwellers.

Nise Malange's poem "A Time of Madness" (Evill and Kromberg, 1988:14-17) addresses the complexity and the toll of inter-community battles in the Cape, brought on as a result of divisions over the 1986 "Black Xmas" consumer boycott. As the speaker struggles obsessively to forget the mayhem, she renders the ongoing psychological consequences of the turmoil for communities across the country:

> the so-called Mpondos and Bacas, the migrants,
> Started slaughtering people and burning their houses,
> Angered with the urban people's ban on celebrations
>
> And whatever they did not destroy the soldiers finished,
> And we hurled petrol bombs,
> And they sliced with their pangas,
> And there was blood, too much blood
> And our parents were killed coming from work,

Still sweated from the day's toil
That I am trying to banish from my memory,
Only to forget,
Only to remember that the wounds must not open again,
Because they have scarred our minds,
We are mentally ill,
We are the mad generation,
Born in the eruption of madness,
Raised when madness struck.

Seitlhamo Motsapi's poem "The Blood Of Poetry" (*Staffrider* 9.2 1990:72) expresses the proximity of art to the strife:

how do i tell you
These poems are
knee-deep in blood
just how do i tell you
These poems have fingers
and can pull triggers

In 1986 the ANC carried out an average of more than five bombings, raids or assassinations per week, if the state's Bureau for Information was to be believed (Davis, 1987:145). Like much of the propaganda intended for the purposes of disinformation, some attacks were falsely attributed to the liberation organisations. In 1997 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission heard from the security forces' Civil Cooperation Bureau that that some of the bombings attributed to the ANC were actually carried out by themselves. The bombings were made to seem like the work of resistance cadres, and the exiled ANC accepted responsibility at the time. The PAC was also blamed for some operations carried out by the security forces' death squads.

The play *Inde Lendlela* (The Long Road) tried to address an issue that many in the struggle found difficult to acknowledge publicly: the bitter infighting that developed within some organisations. Workshopped by the Cape Town-based Nyanga Theatre Players, *Inde Lendlela* represents an attempt to rethink the serious situation of the "infighting between popular leaders, which often results in loss of life [and] makes the freedom road an unnecessarily long one," as the director Phyllis Klotz explained (*New Nation*, 17.3.88:10).

In "A Celebration of Flames" (1992:128-130) Farouk Asvat addresses the intercommunal atrocities that occurred:

What are we
Reduced to?
What insanity
Now drives my people
From the fires
Of liberation

To the corpses of doom

Writhing
In the dance
Of a final
Farewell.

The use of petrol-filled tyre "necklaces" to kill collaborators or suspected collaborators began in 1986. There was a great outcry from the liberal press and from the state propaganda organs, which did not try to contextualise the criminal behaviour. According to the Vlakplaas operative Joe Mamasela, government death squad operatives were involved in some of of the necklacings. The death squads killed activists in order to blame other activists. This was part of the state's strategy to sow dissension, destroy anti-apartheid structures and discredit activists as crazed radicals all at once.

Although many activists deplored such behaviour as being counter-revolutionary, they were unable to address the complex, emotion-charged issue adequately. The difficulty that the banned or restricted liberation organisations faced was that for some of their rank-and-file membership necklacing offered the prospect of summary justice in a profoundly unjust society. James Matthews uses the expressivity of poetry to address the contextual complexities and psychological ambiguities of the necklace murders:

we are living in
spring's wasteland
man/woman stumble
their shoulders necklaced
with fire transforming them
into blazing crosses
their deaths recorded
by choirs of crows
mocking their pain
we have turned ourselves
into charnel houses
the reek of blood
heavy on our breath
our quest for freedom
make us night-stalkers
obscening the fields
with charred flesh
stunted souls we are
drinking too deeply
from poisoned wells
(1990:52)

This poem appears in the appropriately titled *Poisoned Wells* anthology (1990), which addresses the corrosive aspects of the power struggle.

Some of the victims were committed anti-apartheid activists who were killed by other anti-apartheid activists. Such developments led to the escalation of tensions between different factions of the liberation struggle. The war psychosis tended to result in witch hunts that had

little to do with politics. Kelwyn Sole reacted to the atrocities in two poems that are very critical of the "necklace" murders. "Praxis" (1987a:54-8) deals with the necklacing of an old black woman, while "Celebration" (1987a:82-3) addresses the necklacing of an off-duty black policeman:

> the national dance is a funeral
> whirling round and round

Sole warns that such methods of "justice" retard the development of the liberation struggle rather than advance it.

Although Winnie Mandela made a statement that supported necklacing, necklace murders were formally condemned by the ANC, the PAC and AZAPO. The PAC's Johnson Mlambo referred to the

> historical basis of a society established by violence and daily maintained by violence. This environment of violence has tainted some opponents of the system, who use the same means against the oppressed... they hate those among the oppressed who differ with them... some people don't know who their real enemy is, and abuse our noble principle of non-collaboration as a means of silencing other tendencies in order to quickly gain political hegemony within the oppressed community (*Weekly Mail*, 12.12.86:10).

Within the liberation movement there were violations of democratic processes and human rights, such as Winnie Mandela's involvement in the death of the fourteen year old Tumahole activist Stompie Seipei.

While Sole the critic assiduously defended and advanced the cause of the resistance, Sole the poet did not fail to challenge the self-destructive behaviour within the movement. Sole has been very critical of sham democratic practices in sections of the liberation movement. The opening lines of "Organizing the People" (1987a:77) expose repressive notions of unanimity that were sometimes manifest:

> We have no need to vote;
> the answer's clear.
> - Who was that coughing
> in the thirteenth row?
> Take her out.

In "My Countrymen" (1987a:80-1) Sole addresses the need for South Africans to struggle against silences and hesitations:

> the many lessons we haven't learnt
> the courageous stands we never took
> the synapse between pain and knowledge
> of ourselves

Through his use of the word "we" Sole's critique is broadly inclusive of a range of South Africans, which increases its effectiveness in a divided society. "The Blood of our Silence" (1987a:122-3) by Sole is a love poem that renders the dilemmas of a disturbed society in powerful images:

> Everyone
> uses words these days
> as a flag to stuff inside
> the abscess of their skin,
> a medal.
>
> Without seeds to scatter,
> without love,
> lips gape apart as overripe fruit
> cavernous:
> still air
> of mouths opening and shutting,
> opening and shutting.
>
> In the hatreds of us
> between us in a history
> made malignant in the heart,
> where I seek you
> seeking a lost harmony of tongues
> avoiding my eyes
> our bones creek
> towards
> the choir of their massacre

In a review of Sole's anthology *The Blood of our Silence* (1987a), Michael Chapman challenges the way he criticises the liberation movement:

> It seems to me that many white South Africans, especially the ideologically alert variety, must have continuing inner worries about the fact that whether they like it or not they cannot avoid the relative advantages of better education, better pay, better living conditions, etc., and I would have been interested to see more of the poems turning back, interrogatively, on the poet himself (1989:116).

Chapman's sensitivity to need for the writer (whether poet or critic) to problematise his/her role and authority is supported by Spivak's contention that, "through a *historical* critique of your position as the investigating person... you [earn] the right to criticize, and... be heard" (1990:62-3). While such caveats would strengthen Sole's critique, the validity of Sole's analysis is not questioned.

The concluding stanza of Peter Horn's "Canto Ten: Power" (1991:118-9) draws upon cautions raised by Paulo Freire (1972) to warn the oppressed against the abuse of power:

> But beware: when you shoot the powerful
> you have not shot power: power lives on
> in the most secret windings of your cortex.

Horn's words also recall Mattelart's caution regarding the need for the exercise of vigilance in a society with a history of oppression:

> When the oppressor falls, it does not automatically follow that the experiences of cultural resistance are metaphosed into a project of new social relations and a new hegemonic culture (1983:30).

However, in a society with a history of polarisation Horn's use of the second person pronoun ("you") is less effective than the inclusive first person plural form ("we"), for it can give rise to an unnecessary defensiveness.

Horn does not usually exclude himself from his social criticism, as is evident in the reflexive analysis (from the subject position of an activist-poet) in "Letter to a friend overseas" (1991:42-3):

> words have turned blunt in the atmosphere of hate
> that surrounds us. A corrosion, violating our
> minds. Breeding violence.

Horn acknowledges that the horror of the interregnum has led to numbness:

> We have grown accustomed
> to the filth, disgust and fury. We no longer
> feel it. We only move our lips. We mumble.

The treatment of women, as subjects, audiences and writers has been a vexed issue. There have been few women writers, and even fewer who produced resistance literature. Still fewer address the experiences of ordinary women. As is characteristic of the subordinate signifiers in binary pairs, black, female or working class people have been the bearers of meaning, and not the makers or controllers of meaning. In the late-1970s patriarchy was still treated as being natural and it took a long time for women activists to articulate clearly feminist positions. Early expressions, as in the work of Boitumelo Makhema, Winnie Morolo and Lindiwe Mvemve[10] tend to be very cautious and muted. In the *Staffrider* article "Women writers speak" the hegemony of patriarchy requires Manoko Nchwe to offer a disclaimer regarding men in her affirmation of women's writing:

> A writer can never write outside her society. She cannot write about people or their lives unless she shares that life with them. A woman writer must take a valiant self-reliant stand which in no way shall be taken to overthrow men (Boitumelo, 1979:61).

Nchwe outlines the challenges for women at that political conjuncture:

> The ideology of women's liberation is not yet clearly understood by a great number of our women, and how this ideology combines with our distorted culture I do not know (1979:61).

She formulates women's liberation in a way that averts a collision with patriarchy:

> Women's liberation is beyond the relationship between man and woman. It is beyond being freed from man's oppression, but it is the first phase of out struggle to reaffirm our role in the struggle for total liberation (1979:61).

Nchwe's position is not far from the view of women activists of the 1970s and 1980s who believed that gender issues were important but who saw little space in the battle against apartheid and capitalism to open up an additional front.

Attempts to initiate redress were complicated, eg., when *Staffrider* magazine committed a page to women's writing in 1979, it drew mixed responses from writers who welcomed the dedicated space but were wary of ghettoising women's issues. Amelia House was concerned whether there was such a thing as "a woman's point of view" (1980).

The effects of patriarchy on the production of women's writing have been compounded by the structural effects of racial oppression. Miriam Tlali explains how she "tried to bring young women writers together [offering her] house as a meeting place", but found that many impediments, including Bantu education, made it difficult for women to "perceive and express" themselves (Seroke, 1981:43).

Gcina Mhlope's subtle and understated poem "The Dancer" (Mutloatse, 1987:v; Lockett, 1990:352-3) uses the experiences of a mother and a daughter to reflect the social changes resulting from the political turmoil of the 1980s:

> Mama
> they tell me you were a wedding dancer

Celebrating the relationship between the two women, the speaker uses their differences as a measure of the distance this society travelled from innocence in the cause of liberation:

> there are no more weddings
> but many, many funerals
> where we sing and dance
> running fast with the coffin
> of a would-be bride or would-be groom
> strange smiles have replaced our tears
> our eyes are full of vengeance, Mama
>
> Dear, dear Mama,
> they tell me I am a funeral dancer.

Beneath the recollection of the lost joy of a community is the image and resonance of the *toyi-toyi*, the vigorous dance of the 1980s through which comrades expressed political

defiance. Mhlope's subtle treatment of the decline of community life helps her audience come to terms with the toll of pain and horror.

Jennifer Davids depicts a different mother-daughter relationship in the ironically titled "Poem for my mother" (Lockett, 1990:201):

> That isn't everything, you said
> on the afternoon I brought a poem
> to you hunched over the washtub...
>
> A poem isn't all
> there is to life, you said

Spivak's caution that "The subaltern as female cannot be heard or read.... The subaltern cannot speak" (1988:308) is pertinent at two levels in this poem. One level involves the patriarchal enclosure of silence within which the mother is located, her deflating response reflecting the crisis of her own insertion into patriarchy, where, as handmaid, she is unable to comprehend, much less support or savour, her daughter's bid for self-expression. At another level, there is the question of whether *either* of the women can hear each other's voice over the impositions of patriarchy.

As women writers developed within the resistance movement they exposed the contradictions of their contexts. Fatima Dike's "For a Black Woman" (Lockett,1990:225) challenges an old working class African woman's response to oppression:

> Pain is old
> Pain is deep
> Pain is personal
> Toothache at four
> Heartbreak at sixteen
> Birthpains at twentyfour
> And now the pain of still being a girl at sixtyfour.
> Patience has its limits
> Taken too far it's cowardice.

The risk of using such an exhortation is that the intended audience may be so debilitated as to be further discouraged. But Dike suggests that any respite such an oppressed group achieves will only be won through struggle.

Impatience with the submissive behaviour of older women is a marker of generational differences: Dike, like Davids, Mhlope and Malange, is of a generation of women activists who learned to be assertive, not just against racial oppression but against class and gender oppression as well, challenging the stock conflation that nationalists of various kinds tend to make between woman and mother (the slippage persists, and women continue to be seen as mothers first and last).

Owing to the pervasive sexism in the liberation movements issues such as feminism were treated as a matter of private conviction until well into the 1980s. It was tacitly accepted that

women's rights would have to be fought for after apartheid had been defeated. Challenging the marginalisation of women within the liberation movement, Gcina Mhlope's assertive poem "Say No" (Lockett, 1990:351-2) incites women not to tolerate the replacement of white patriarchy with black patriarchy. The poet's strategy seems to be that if women could anticipate a significant improvement in their situation in a post-apartheid society, they would be likely to participate more actively in the struggle.

> Say No, Black Woman
> Say No
> When they give you a back seat
> in the liberation wagon
> Say No
> Yes Black Woman
> a Big NO

Mhlope's postion supports the long struggles of organisations like the National Organisation of Women, by means of which women's rights were gradually brought to the fore by the end of the 1980s.

The advancement of women's voices in South African society raises other challenges. Cecily Lockett who has anthologised the work of Mhlope, Davids, Malange and others, has tried to redress the situation that "the language and discourse of poetry have always been the property of men, and developed for their particular use" (1990:21). While Lockett's contribution to a neglected dimension of South African poetry is invaluable, her grasp of gender exclusion does not seem to include a sensitivity to racial exclusion or class exclusion. The selective mode of affirming the interests of women in a society also riven by race and class raises questions about the depth of commitment to a culture of liberation. While single-issue advocacy can be justified, a studied avoidance of other forms of discrimination neglects the complex conjunctures that produce the various forms of oppression.

Notes

1. "SBs" was a common term for the Special Branch police, ie., the state security police.

2. Ad Donker was unwilling to publish the poems because of the risk of banning, so Serote published the collection through the Medu Art Ensemble in Botswana. It was banned in South Africa. Most of the poems in the collection were, however, slipped in at the end of Serote's "Collected Poems" (which was published by Ad Donker, later in 1982).

3. Women, like Pearl Tshabalala and Phindile Mfeti, and youths, like Sicelo Dhlomo, were also killed in detention.

4. The poem comes from *Cry Rage!* the 1972 publication by Matthews and Gladys Thomas that was banned.

5. There is a slightly different version of Sankie Nkondo's "Solomon Mahlangu addresses his gaolers" (Feinberg, 1980:125-6), under Nkondo's *nom de guerre*, Rebecca Matlou:

I offer my people echoes of
happiness
You who dread the mysteries to come
You who curfew your minds
with your backs to the prison wall
cradle it until you stoop
until it drills your chest
Until you bow to melt
into broken pieces of hope
bow to fate
hold its quivering tail
I touch this darkness and give
meaning.

6. It was later published in the anthology *Iqabane Labantu*, edited by Coetzee and Willemse (1989:91-2).

7. In Coetzee and Willemse (1989:92). The quotation comes from the parliamentary record, *Hansard*.

8. Joe Mamasela, an *askari* (a disaffected ANC member who was caught and turned into a double-agent or a member of the death squads by the security forces) has given testimony regarding the involvement of the death squads in some of the township necklacings (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1995). In addition, Max du Preez has pointed out that necklacing was started by the white Rhodesian security forces in the 1970s

and adopted by the South African death squads (he refers to the death squads' predilection for "braaing" the bodies of their victims as evidence).

9. However, Umkhonto we Sizwe was infiltrated by the government's Military Intelligence, as a result of which cadres like Modise were captured. In any event Umkhonto we Sizwe was overshadowed by the might, infrastructure and *modus operandi* of the SADF.

10. Refer to *Staffrider* 2.3 (1979:60-1) and *Staffrider* 3.3 (1980:47).

Chapter Ten: Reconstructing education and history

10.1 Education struggles

In many societies the education system has been used as an important instrument of upliftment and redress. In South Africa, the apartheid government used Bantu education (for those few who managed to go to school at all) to entrench its ideology.[1] Already weighed down by the socio-economic effects of apartheid-capitalism, African children found no redress in education. By separating school children on the basis of race the government was able to spend disproportionate amounts on different "race groups". Twelve school children had to make do with the allocation that was given for the education of a single white schoolchild (Omond, 1985:77). The effects of the various inequities were apparent in the overcrowded, poorly equipped schools and in the results. Samuel points out that for each African matriculant in 1975 there were forty-four white students (Nasson and Samuel, 1990:19), in a society where Africans outnumber whites by the ratio of 5:1.

Daniel Kunene's poem "Do not ask me" (Couzens and Patel, 1982:403-4) conveys the regime's monopolisation of resources through the myth of the *amasi* bird[2]:

> an army with giant boots
> came towering over them
> Brand new guns
> made to silence little children who cry
> glinting in the African sun
> The gun-toters threw the *amasi* bird
> back into the pot
> and wrote on it with the government's ink
> *For white children only*
> and henceforth it was guarded night and day

Pupil-teacher ratios further illustrate the disparities of apartheid: there were eighteen white children to a teacher while there were forty-three African children to a teacher (Omond, 1985:77). The poor quality of teacher training was part of the systematic underdevelopment of black education. Only a fraction of the teachers had a tertiary qualification, the majority had not obtained matric (most had a couple of years of high school), and a fifth had not attended high school at all. Besides being underqualified, they were very poorly paid, as Samuel indicates: only 1,7% of black teachers had tertiary qualifications, and this group earned only 55-63% of white teachers' salaries (Nasson and Samuel, 1990:20).

In the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s education proved to be an important arena for the articulation of struggle against the state. The 1976 students' revolt signified the beginning of a new phase. In June 1976 the Minister of Bantu Education decided that African pupils would be taught half of their school subjects in Afrikaans. Students were

agitated because the partial introduction of Afrikaans in 1975, for the teaching of mathematics and social science in Form 1, had resulted in a sharp increase in the failure rate (Nasson and Samuel, 1990:21). On 16 June 20 000 students marched through Soweto in protest against Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. They were attacked by the police, as Oswald Mtshali's poem "Hector Petersen - the young martyr" (1980:29-30) records:

> The guns blazed,
> fired at unarmed schoolchildren

Hector Petersen, a youth who was not in the march but on a neighbourhood errand for his mother, was the first child to be killed:

> Hector Petersen, victim of wanton savagery,
> you lay there serene in rivulets of blood and tears

The students had embarked on their protest with no more radical a demand than the retention of English as the medium of instruction, while Afrikaans remained as another school subject. However, the actions of the security forces provoked them. The state, which should have mediated, chose to declare war against the unarmed scholars. In a poem reminiscent of William Carlos Williams' "The Lonely Street", Chris van Wyk's laconic "One Day in June" (1979:46) contrasts the simplicity of the scholars' demands with the excessive reaction of the state. Van Wyk suggests that the only knowledge the students acquired from the state was incidental: they learnt, at first hand, of the brutality and chauvinism of the state, and the reasons the older generations were so cowed.

> Children walk.
> A sea of faces
> who want to learn
> anything
> but Afrikaans.
>
> A gun rattles
> Blood spurts.
> They have learnt so much
> about the Afrikaner.
>
> Children walk.
> A plethora of faces
> who want to learn.

The brutality of the state compounded the existing crisis and provoked the students into retaliation. Prescribed to all their lives by the apartheid state (and by a social system that entrenched an uncritical respect for the decisions of adults or other "superiors") the "children determined to prescribe themselves free", as Ilva Mackay declares in the poem "Africa" (Feinberg, 1980:101).

Beginning with the Soweto uprising, children and youth took on serious responsibilities in the struggle. Serote's "Behold Mama, Flowers" (1978:21) pays tribute to the contribution

of the youth in lines which parody the characteristic complaints of adults, even to the grudging admiration in the undertone:

> everything that you see now
> everything that you hear
> speaks about children who never listened when they were told

The actions of the schoolchildren aroused other sectors of the oppressed community, who were already contending with the recession, poor conditions in the townships, the pass laws and influx control. In addition, the liberation struggles in Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia had generated an atmosphere of rising expectations. These factors contributed to a general uprising across the Reef and Pretoria. Over the next two months there was a nationwide insurrection, with some 200 communities involved, as parents and workers joined the stay-away (*azikwelwa*) calls initiated by the students. Serote's "Song of Experience" (1978:75-78) alludes to the impact of the school children's resistance on the adults:

> remember how our home
> our fathers and mothers were taken away by a howling
> and were again taught speech and how to walk

There was a successful campaign to prevent rent increases in Soweto. The police used dogs, guns teargas, and raided houses, searched people, prohibited gatherings, shot protestors and detained people without trial. Bantu administration buildings, beer halls, liquor stores and schools were burnt to the ground (Christie, 1985:238-9). In October 1977 almost all BC organisations were banned, and many students fled the country to swell the ranks of the ANC's Umkhonto we Sizwe. In 1978 Soyikwa (a Section 21 company, not for gain) was established by the Creative Youth Association, on Black Consciousness principles, to occupy and educate scholars during the school boycotts. Matsemela Manaka emerged as its leader.

In 1980 the state-appointed Cillie Commission into the uprising arrived at a surprising finding:

> Bantu Education was not a cause of the riots. It was, to a certain degree the cause of dissatisfaction; this dissatisfaction was to some extent stirred up and exploited by those bent on creating disturbances (Christie, 1985:239).

However, the state had to withdraw its ruling regarding Afrikaans as the medium of instruction. Little was done about the conditions that had triggered the 1976 uprising. Bantu education was still enforced and the shortage of schools worsened. The police and the army patrolled the townships and the schools, and students and student organisations continued to be harassed. School boycotts were common: some 200 000 pupils were affected.

There were scant improvements in the next decade. In 1971/2 for each African pupil the state had allocated an abysmal 5,5% of the sum it spent on each white pupil. By 1986/7 this figure had risen to 19% (Pillay in Nasson and Samuel, 1990:31). The low

matriculation pass rates of the Department of Education and Training ("Bantu education") students show even greater disparities: eg., in 1985 only 24% passed, of whom 5% obtained exemptions, ie., university entrance (Muller, 1987:20). Those who managed to attend university were stymied in that Bantu education, which equipped students for little beyond unskilled manual labour, had not prepared students for tertiary education. Only a tiny fraction of this group had the skills-background to gain admittance to the sciences or commerce. The vast majority were restricted to the humanities, where they were subjected to remote and obscure Eurocentric traditions of knowledge that bore little connection to the challenges students faced, as Mafika Gwala indicates in "Getting off the Ride" (Chapman, 1982:134-9):

> I'm the puzzled student
> burning to make head and tail of Aristotle
> because he hasn't heard of the buried
> Kingdom of Benin or the Zimbabwe Empire,
> The student who is swotting himself to madness
> striving for universal truths made untrue.

The sense of frustration and defeat that was generated by the ideological state apparatus is also addressed in the ironic lines of Zinjiva Winston Nkondo's poem "This is how the centuries went" (1990:38):

> we went to school to make certain
> we hate ourselves

While the schools and universities were failing their students, Winnie Morolo questions the role of parents as primary educators in a poem that was first published in 1978, "Thula Sana Lwam!" (Ndaba 1986:73). Morolo shows the mother to occupy a very powerful subject position in relation to the needs of her child and the struggle. Ostensibly a lullaby (for the consumption of the authorities), Morolo's speaker draws upon the oral tradition as women have done in their role as educators in African society. Morolo's portrayal of the role of the woman is very different from most constructions of the time. In a subtle challenge to the patriarchal and racial limitations placed upon the roles of black women, Morolo shows that women have not just been helpless and fearful victims of the political turmoil, who could only lament. Instead the speaker uses the space she has to be an active agent in the political education of her young child. Morolo draws upon the authority of the oral tradition to support her recovery of the role of mother as educator. In an embattled society the poet affirms the powerful role of the mother/parents as the primary agent/s of education and values, asserting that this role is not necessarily a conservative one:

> *Thula Sana Lwam, Thula baba.*
> *Hush my baby, Lullaby son.*
> Your father is miles away
> Your granny is banned
> Your grandpa has gone with the contract
> Your uncle is in the military
> Your auntie is in detention
> Your niece will be buried tomorrow

Your nephew is lost
Your cousin is invalid...
Let's drink this water to survive

Urbanization had led to the erosion of mothers' and grandmothers' roles as educators of children, without offering a viable alternative: mission education reached only a small proportion of children, and the Bantu education that replaced it was a ramshackle operation. At the same time, industrialization and the influx control laws led to the breakdown of the family, and women became the principal or sole breadwinners. Although their parental responsibilities increased, their authority, particularly over male children, has been thwarted by the old and new systems of patriarchy. This has been to the detriment of the youth who grew up without benefitting from their remaining parent's experience and values.

Youth and revolution is an established combination. Since the Soweto uprising children and youth have carried serious responsibilities in the struggle against oppression. Consistently leading most of the anti-government resistance, they have borne the brunt of the regime's reprisals, including the bulk of the detentions of the 1970s and 1980s, and the civil war of the 1980s. These factors were compounded by the structural inequities of apartheid. Besides being poorly educated black youth have been the most malnourished and badly housed sector of the population (National Household Survey, 1995:27; 36) Kenalemang wa Tau, a youth from Tlhababe, wrote "I am one of them" (1989:23):

I am one of them
one of those hungry students
in the distant farms...
I am one of them
one of those children
whose noble dreams are buried
in the gutters of hunger and starvation

In spite of (and possibly because of) these factors the liberation struggle owes much to the commitment, resilience and organisational capacity of the youth. They proved most able at capitalising on their adversities. Virtually in contradiction to the usual impact of history, the youth revolt seemed to have benefitted from the weak education in history, from a lack of awareness of precisely what black people had lost. Such substantive cultural and structural gaps can have dangerous and tragic consequences. However, at this point South African youth, as agents of change, seem to have gained almost as much as they had lost through the silencing of their history. One result was that they were not intimidated by the history of oppression. Disinherited, they were not checked by entrenched "wisdom". Those aspects of their history that the youth valorized were outside the official discourses and they were sufficiently unhappy with their lot to respond to its mythic power as well as to focus on their own historical role as catalysts.

Four years after the watershed Soweto boycott, the 1980 schools boycott began in Cape Town. It was taken up by most black (including Coloured and Indian) schools across the country, with inevitable clashes with the security forces, as James Matthews' poem "Would the gutters be bathed in blood" (1981:16) records grimly:

children taking their demands to the street
where batons will feed on their
flesh

There was a national uprising against the state's educational system, with the black universities of Fort Hare, Transkei, Turfloop, Zululand, Western Cape and Durban-Westville joining in. Lessons learnt from the earlier boycotts made a difference to strategising and organising. In 1980, as in 1976, the struggles were not only about the educational system but also about the political system. These boycotts had the effect of placing education on the political agenda of both state and civil movements.

During the schools' boycotts education was severely disrupted when students were attacked by the security forces. Many among this group of school children were radicalised while some were badly traumatised. Most of the problems of "the lost generation" can be traced to the turbulence of this period when black schools and other educational institutions became the key sites of resistance to apartheid. Riot police, armoured vehicles and SADF patrols became regular features of many township schools and some universities.

Activism in education in this period proved to be critical not just to the educational sphere but to related struggles, eg., the boycotts against hikes in transport and service costs. Literacy programmes were run by student structures, community and non-governmental organisations. In February 1984 the Education Charter Campaign was organised by UDF-linked education organizations: the Azanian Students Organisation (AZASO), the Congress of South African Students (COSAS), the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) and the National Education Union of South Africa (NEUSA). Inspired by the example of people like Matthew Goniwe, a Cradock schoolteacher who was a community activist, thousands of teachers across the country began to participate in the struggle. The State of Emergency, which was first proclaimed in July 1985, was to some extent in response to the intense struggles over education. Abduraghiem Johnstone's poem "The pupils - emergency one" (Coetzee and Willemse, 1989:110), uses irony to address the effect on most students of the state's criminalization of the initiatives for reform:

You have acquired
a new vocabulary
    curfew
    emergency
    treason

COSAS, principally an organisation of secondary schoolchildren, quickly became the largest umbrella student organisation and the single largest affiliate of the United Democratic Front. Its campaign for the introduction of democratic students' representative councils was a far-reaching demand in the struggle for the democratisation of education. In 1985 COSAS was the first organisation to be banned since the "Black October" of 1977, leaving school students without organisation or direction (Muller, 1987:20; Webster and Friedman, 1989:25). The number of youths who were detained grew sharply and there

were almost 10 000 detainees aged between nine and eighteen years in 1986-7 (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:125,135-6).

The Soweto Parents' Crisis Committee arose to demand the unbanning of COSAS, the release of detainees, the recognition of student representative councils, the postponement of exams, the restoration of damaged school buildings, the reinstatement of teachers and the lifting of the state of emergency (Muller, 1987:21). However, in the disarray that followed the nationwide bannings and detentions some students began to see themselves as the vanguard of the national liberation struggle, and tended to operate in abstraction from other progressive structures. It was in this context that the slogan "Liberation before Education" took root. This proved to be perilous for a whole generation of students, given that the fall of the government was not iminent. Owing to the depth of the educational and political crises, more and more students began to believe that schooling was pointless. In "Then the children decided" (1985:57) Donald Parenzee, the activist and Peninsula Technikon lecturer suggests how the education struggles were played out in some institutions. The poet uses the images of books and bodies to suggest that the real failure of apartheid education was evident in the uncritical behaviour of its victims who could only imitate the destructive behaviour of the authorities. In desperate rebellion, lacking direction and substance, the students vented their anger by destroying whatever was within reach:

> Then the children decided that
> decades of words
> having covered their pages,
> grown from the spines
> of decaying texts,
> nourished on brain,
> singed into skin,
> that centuries
> of so much print
> would be edited,
>
> censored,
>
> burnt, if necessary
> to free the heart
> of the problem, and soon
> headless
> screaming vowels,
> dismembered paragraphs,
> the bodies of essays,
> whole crusts of theses,
> littered the playgrounds, decaying
> like the entrails of statues
>
> and rearing
> like some statue of liberty,
> the heart,

stripped of skin,
pumped its desperate slogans
into the fetid air.

One organisation that could have made a difference to the situation was the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC), which had been part of the "Return to School" movement. However, most of the NECC executive had been detained in 1986. The NECC had been engaged with the development of the concept of "people's education for people's power". People's education had begun at the initative of the Soweto Parents' Crisis Committee (Muller, 1987:19), and developed in the context of challenges to the structures of the state by defence committees, street committees, people's courts and other organs of popular power, as well as evolving substantially through the two consultative conferences of the NECC. Representing an attempt to develop education for the transformation of society, people's education signified a decisive shift in the education struggle. It arose out of the recognition that the struggle for people's education was not the struggle of students alone. The importance of political and general education, and the link between politics, education and social transformation was emphasised. People's education was conceptualised as part of the national liberation struggle and was linked to it ideologically, organisationally and strategically, offering hope for liberation from an inferior and disabling system:

> People's education articulates a common vocabulary of hope and protest for educational aspiration. This leads in turn to a collective search for a new range of opposition tactics (Muller, 1987:18).

People's education had emerged during 1986, the "Year of Remembrance" which was the tenth anniversary of the Soweto uprising, and also the "Year of *Umkhonto we Sizwe*" (1987:19). It exemplified the change from a strategy of militant struggle in which education was to be temporarily sacrificed (1987:26), to a strategy in which emancipatory education was an integral part of struggle.

Keith Gottschalk's "awareness programme: the grammar lesson" (Coetzee & Willemse, 1989:84-5) expresses the irrepressible spirit of people's education, exposing the ideology of the hegemonic discourses and repressive modes of communication in the first part:

class
always
we have had prose

mood: imperative
case: possessive
tense: pluperfect
voice: passive, negative
person: singular

examples: "moenie"
"toonbank gesluit"
"slegs blankes"

"waar's jou pas?
"we will show no mercy"
"laat die donner vrek"

this is called: traditional grammar

The poem goes on to offer an alternative lexicon based on the communicative potential of the genre, with examples designed to appeal to youth:

class
for today and tomorrow
let's poem

mood: indicative
case: accusative
tense: the future
voice: active & positive
person: collective

examples: forbidden couplets cuddle
student quatrains boycott
dactyls distribute leaflets
iambic and trochaic feet
march to secret rendezvous
with vigilant anapests

The third part of the poem is militant and Gottschalk concludes by appropriating a concept from structural linguistics to label his socio-linguistic approach:

clandestine poems scatter leaflets
worker poems strike for wages
militant poems barricade streets
cadre poems coordinate rhythms
armed poems
slip across patrolling frontiers
through nights without passes
dig caesures to trap statutes
ambush convoys of detention warrants
fire rocket propelled stanzas at SASOLs;
people's poems
mass in raised fist cantos
chant the Charter, sing *Umzima Lomthwalo* -

this, class
we call
transformational grammar

In February 1988 the state detained the whole executive of the NECC and restricted 18 other anti-apartheid organisations. The South African Youth Congress (SAYCO) was also banned, only a year after its establishment. By this time most of its leadership was already banned or detained. There were the thousands of pupils on boycott, and students represented the largest category of detainees (Webster and Friedman, 1989:23). Frederikse points out that youth accounted for 80% of the detainees in this period (1990:259). During the succession of states of emergency, the number of youth detained comprised almost half of the total of 50 000 people, which suggests the figure of almost 25 000 youth (*Weekly Mail*, 8.6.90:6).

The "Save the Children" campaign, which was established to draw attention to the state's incarceration and torture of children was banned. Peter Horn's "Canto Thirteen: There is a Writing on my Body" (1991:123-4) emphasises how the conflict in education, between the repressive culture of apartheid and the culture of liberation, was fought out on the terrain of the bodies and minds of the youth:

> There is a writing on my body
> in weals and wounds and burns.
> There is a writing on my body,
> was written so I should learn.
>
> I won't sit still in school.
> and I won't work till I die,
> I won't shut my trap,
> and I will revolt!
> Yes, I will revolt!

There is little poetic licence in Horn's depiction of the suffering that schoolchildren endured at the hands of the security forces who took over many schools. One attorney disclosed that in the course of her investigative work she encountered children as young as ten

> with lacerated tongues from electric wire pushed into their mouths during interrogations by the police ... children with swollen eyes and gashed foreheads after they had been struck by rifle butts (Odendaal in Hill and Harris, 1989:135).

Community-based organisations became involved in the process to address the problems in education. There was the Bachaki Theatre Company which had been "founded under a tree at Joubert Park near Johannesburg station. This was a convenient place as we came from different townships" (*Weekly Mail*, 16.9.88:9). In 1988 Bachaki performed "Top Down", a satirical play about black education, and paid particular attention to the dilemmas of teachers, who were under attack from all quarters in this period.

In comparison to other locations in society, universities were relatively free spaces during the 1980s for progressive mobilisation against the state (this varied depending on the nature of the institutions, but the white liberal institutions generally had more latitude than

other institutions). The homeland institutions suffered the worst repression, with the SADF setting up a base at the University of the North (Turfloop). Demonstrations at various institutions were subject to riot squad attacks. "Canto Five: The Mafia" (1991:109-10) by Peter Horn recounts the developments at the University of Cape Town on 27 April 1987 with irony:

> Today the Mafia visited the campus
> in riot gear and safety helmets
> armed with sjamboks and shotguns
> and made us an offer we could not refuse:
>
> they were to pacify the campus
> and rid us of undesirable elements
> and restore law and order in the classroom
> with teargas and buckshot

Horn's poem has echoes of the furore around academic freedom which occurred in 1986 when Connor Cruise O'Brien tried to deliver a lecture at the University of Cape Town while the academic boycott was being observed by the resistance movement. Horn appears to be challenging the narrow liberal defence of academic freedom, given that the campus was subject to the SADF. This suggests that even one of the most exalted of functions of a university, the provision of a forum for open debate, was fettered. Horn implies that the much vaunted academic freedom only occurs within extremely narrow and conservative boundaries of privilege:

> they assured us that the academic freedom
> of the supporters of the national Mafia
> would be in no way disturbed
> they would only eliminate the enemies of the boss
>
> there will be a liaison committee
> of army, police and administration
> to prevent further communist attacks
> against the integrity of this admirable institution
>
> the few thousands who objected against their presence
> would soon be taught different
> after all they had the better arguments:
> caspirs and guns and teargas and sjamboks
>
> so who wants to argue against them? (1991:109-10)

In his untitled poem which begins with the words "book-learners filled with the confusion of" (1990:57) the working class writer James Matthews is dismissive of the chattering classes of intellectuals. Given the conservative liberal denigration of his writing such an attitude is not surprising:

> book-learners filled with the confusion of

a revolution
they have never had
construct socialism a nirvana lettered on
a page
freedom talkers speaking in the name
of people
theorize the end of opppressors
secured in the safety of
their studies

Jeremy Cronin, who once taught in the philosophy and politics departments of the University of Cape Town, had a sense of his role as teacher that parallels Biko's and Goniwe's in its breadth of vision. In "To learn how to speak" (1983:58), which was written while he was a political prisoner, Cronin affirms that all South Africans, privileged and oppressed, should learn how to speak as people who belong to this society. "To learn how to speak" has echoes of Sipho Sepamla's didactic poem "The Odyssey" (1976:17-19):

discover the lie of our mountain humps...
where the tugela falls and then flows
and gives rise to a rich promise

by all means make these discoveries
but don't be in haste
to climb
to tumble
and to pronounce

Both poets demonstrate that "[o]ne of the first tasks of the culture of resistance was to reclaim, rename, and reinhabit the land" (Said, 1993:273).

In "To learn how to speak" Cronin asserts that there is an intimate connection between the body, the land and the solar system. This is done through amusing associations with a characteristically South African vocalization of surprise ("ooh" is inferred), which Cronin suggests is cow-skinned. This signifies the vocalization of the most valued of animals (and recalls the titles of the first anthologies of Mtshali, Serote and Gwala). But the cow also has another old connection to the moon (in the nursery rhyme) for to describe the "ooh" the mouth takes a rounded (full moon) shape. The point the philosopher, communist and teacher seems to be making is that as located as South Africans ought to be in their immediate context, they are also integrally a part of a broader system. This signifies the multiple axes of location that inform identity. These lines also tease the reader about the relationship between articulation and location, in a refreshing mix of the ideological, the naive, the material, and the expressive, challenging the regime's stereotype of the doctrinaire communist.

"To learn how to speak" addresses the struggle to enunciate liberatory ideas at the same time as it celebrates the sensuousness of verbal articulation: language has to connect with the materiality the earth ("the stoneness of these stones"). Showing a syncretic grasp of classical learning, radical politics, eco-sensitivity, Sepamla's poem and local linguistic

customs, Cronin uses the landscape to refer to solipsistic truth systems: the South Africanism "I'm telling you" insists (a little chauvinistically) on the truth of that which is being contended. This is another sly reference to the preoccupations with the received traditions of English literature and western philosophy, which inhibit an openness to the textures of untheorised experience. The words also suggest an ordinary desire to be credible. In the lines "stompie... just boombang" Cronin affirms the appropriacy and resonance of local terms, and subtly suggests that this lexicon has stronger claims to validity than the old truth demands: "just to understand the least inflections" sounds modest, but this is a political and linguistic task that has been neglected. The poet is at pains to illustrate the intimate connections between culture, development and language. Learning to speak in all our voices as a society is both a personal and a deeply ideological project.

To learn how to speak
With the voices of the land,
To parse the speech in its rivers,
To catch in the inarticulate grunt,
Stammer call, cry, babble, tongue's knot
A sense of the stoneness of these stones
From which all words are cut.
To trace with the tongue wagon-trails
Saying the suffix of their aches in -kuil, pan, -fontein,
In the watery names that confirm
The dryness of their ways.
To visit the places of occlusion, or the lick
in a vlei-bank dawn.
To bury my mouth in the pit of your arm,
In that planetarium,
Pectoral beginning to the nub of time
Down there close to the water-table, to feel
The full moon as it drums
At the back of my throat
Its cow-skinned vowel.
To write a poem with words like:
I'm telling you,
Stompie, stickfast, golovan,
Songololo, just boombang, just
To understand the least inflections,
To voice without swallowing
Syllables born in tin shacks, or catch
the 5.15 ikwata bust fife
Chwannisberg train, to reach
The low chant of the mine gang's
Mineral glow of our people's unbreakable resolve.

To learn how to speak
With the voices of this land (1983:58).

Cronin's poem shows the value of learning in a developing society. The yearning that the poem expresses for authentic knowledge and language is as intense as the yearning in the region for water (as expressed in the first half of the poem).

Building on Horn's critique in "Canto Five: The Mafia" (1991:109-10), Cronin's poem may be understood as part of a corpus that demonstrates that authority is based not only on texts or the professional appropriation and wielding of discourses. Intellectual authority may also be defined through intervention in relationships of power and knowledge that work against the general human interest (Merod, 1987:134).

10.2 Memory and history

> Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip.... By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it (Fanon, 1963:210).

The systems of political and cultural domination have determined systems of discursive and interpretive authority. Political domination includes the negation of the histories of dominated peoples, as Luli Callinicos argues:

> One of the lesser-known crimes of apartheid, like colonialism elsewhere in Africa, has been to silence, distort and maim our history (*Weekly Mail*, 20.1.89:29).

This has also been evident in the practices of the state and the conservative liberal critics: for instance, to celebrate the role of their "ethnic group" in the cultural history of South Africa the anthologists Marcia Leveson and Jonathan Paton (1985) found it necessary to remove black people from history.

Counter-histories have been critical to resistance movements. Through the medium of plays such as *Wathint'Abafazi, Wa'thint'Imbokotho*, *Hamba Dompas*, *Bambatha's Children*, *Asinamali* (1985), and *Steve Biko: The Inquest* (c.1985) the history of resistance has been affirmed at critical political junctures. Given "the exploitation of knowledge by the interests of power to create a distorted historical record" resistance narratives are "interventions into the historical record, attempting to produce and impart new historical facts and analyses" (Harlow, 1987:116). The deconstruction of the dominant myths,

structures, logics and discourses of history challenges the sanction of institutions and disciplines. But this is no easy process. Mattelart writes that often there is

> the difficulty of the dominated classes to overcome the alienation eroding their collective memory and accede to their own representation of themselves (1983:19)

For the oppressed, engaging with the ruling political and social order has never been easy, no less so in the construction of a credible record of a difficult past. Every generation of oppressed people who seek to challenge their condition quickly learn the significance of a knowledge of history in confronting the challenges of the present. In addition there are questions regarding who produces information, who interprets it and who disseminates it.

Literature is a discourse in which political struggles are played out. At an ideological level literature has the capacity to generate and sustain historical identities that have been suppressed at the political level. Although poetry and history tend to have marked out different kinds of "truths", the structural demarcation of the disciplines is often contested in the construction of resistance narratives.

The rhetoric of exclusion has had a long history in South Africa, as the journalist Thabo Thulo demonstrates when he connects old constructs of exclusion with modern practices in the poem "Stray Person" (1989:30). The subject of the poem has faced the contingencies that have burdened most African people under National Party rule: at birth he was "a stray baby", because he was born in South Africa, a country that "was not of his origin" (ie., not his "homeland" in the logic of apartheid). At school, the pattern was repeated:

> he was a brilliant scholar.
> But went astray.
> Jumping over the school fence.
> Into teargas filled streets (1989:30)

At work the randomness of oppressed experience affected him again. Even his death was the consequence of an accident, by the logic convenient to the state. The word "stray" raises a telling set of associations, all linked to political power. The history books of the dominant have narrated how the first white settlers encountered indigenous people like "Harry the Hottentot" (Autshumao) "roaming around" the Cape. Like "roam", the word "stray" stands as a signifier of dispossession. Such discursive logic pre-empted any question that the land had been snatched from black people.

Serote's poem "Time Has Run Out" offers a challenging, less-than-heroic reconstruction of history. The poem first appeared in Serote's collection *The Night Keeps Winking* (1982a), which was published in Botswana and banned in South Africa. A slightly different version was slipped into Serote's *Selected Poems* (1982b:127):

> remember the ship in the 16th century
> remember how the portugese
> whipped and running

rode the wave back to where they came
remember the arrow
the night saw it all
when muscles were torn by tension
when hands in furious rhythm threw spear after spear
in defence of a land

This version of history, even distant history, is necessary to affirm the identity and projects of oppressed people. Ingoapele Madingoane's *africa my beginning* (1979:24-5) makes clear ideological choices when dealing with the problem of historical record, asserting that the purpose of history Medupe is not just to embellish the dominant. Instead, Madingoane and his cultural group have worked towards enabling oppressed people to speak to and of themselves as a community, and so attempt to balance the external representations. Showing that history, like freedom, is always in the making, Madingoane invokes the ancestral heroes of the anti-colonial struggles to recover and reconstruct identity. In *Umhlaba Wethu* (1987) Mothobi Mutloatse, as editor, attempts a similar project.

Oppressed people had to construct their own history, as the first step towards overcoming the ruling classes' monopoly over meaning. Locating oppression within a specific time frame is a critical step towards reconstruction. Through its facility for rendering the inchoate literature enables the early stages of transformation. All art forms have the capacity

> to establish with that past a dialogue which is organised around continuities and discontinuities, identifications and ruptures. It is in this way, by making the past a transient and contingent reality rather than an absolute origin, that a *tradition* is given form (Laclau 1990:98).

Such an understanding of history is distinct from a monumental (chauvinistic) conception of it, and invokes the early sense of the word "poet" as a maker of meanings.

Other distortions of history are challenged in Zinjiva Winston Nkondo's poem "This is how the centuries went" (1990:38):

Shaka became the murderer
for building a nation
Dingaan became treacherous
for self defence

Here Nkondo is challenging what Kelwyn Sole called "Alpine sentences of power" in his poem "The Discourse of History" (1987a:111-112).

In "History Books Amen!" (1983:30-1) Sipho Sepamla displays a satirist's disdain for Christian national education, which wielded history to coerce consent. The ironic title points to the amalgam of history and religion that was used to legitimate apartheid:

I know my history damn well
to begin with it has little to do with 1652

In "The Tears of a Creator" (1986:49-56) the worker poets Hlatshwayo and Qabula anticipate a time when

> Mountains of lies shall be torn to shreds
> The gates of apartheid shall burst asunder
> The history books of deception shall be thrown out (1986:55)

Resistance writers tend to draw on the histories of other liberation struggles for inspiration. In "Crocodiles" (1989:39-40) Mzwakhe Mbuli refers to Agostinho Neto, the Angolan leader, to inspire activists:

> Agostinho Neto the late Poet-President
> Used both the pen and the machine
> To achieve the liberation of Angola.

By contrast, Ngema's early play *Asinamali* (1985), which recounts the rent and transport boycotts that began in Lamontville and spread across the country, refrains from the temptation of the "great man" approach to history. Although Msizi Dube is well known as the Lamontville community activist, the focus of the play is on the actions of the community, which refused to be defeated by various setbacks, including Dube's assassination. The play celebrates the political history of ordinary, even apolitical, people as they struggled to come to terms with their historical situation.

The singular, totalising and essentialist historical truths of the dominant are challenged in the polemical style, the episodic structure and the rapid pace of *Woza Albert!* (Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, 1983). Its treatment of oppressed subjects is witty and optimistic as it affirms the historical agency of people whom the state diminished and banished from the master narratives. The tactical use of historical characters like *Morena* (Christ) and Albert Lutuli in *Woza Albert!* and Msizi Dube in *Asinamali* represent a strategic fusing of the genres of drama and history to challenge the power of the state.

Serote's "Behold Mama, Flowers" (1978:12) suggests that confronting the worst aspects of the history of oppression can strengthen people's determination to challenge their oppressors. The speaker refers to the millions of African people who were abducted and sold into slavery. A large proportion died as a result of the conditions under which they were transported to the Americas. Such knowledge helps people to cope with the challenges of their own history, which include transmuting pain into action for change:

> how can i forget, even if i want to forget
> that in the fathoms of the sea are bones
> screaming bones still chained and bloodstained
> how can i forget

Serote was determined that the history of the oppressed would function not only as a marker of tragedy but as an instrument of transformation. Mafika Gwala demonstrates with defiant solidarity in "Afrika at a Piece (On Heroes Day)" (1982:44-46) that history can be used to maintain coherence in the long and unequal battles over basic rights:

> Our blackman's history
> is not written in classrooms
> on wide smooth boards
> Our history shall be written
> at the factory gates
> at the Unemployment offices
> in the scorched queues of dying mouths

Gwala points out that any recognition that the black working-class has achieved has been hard won, in contrast to the history that aggrandises the exploits of the ruling elites:

> Our history is being written
> with indelible blood stains (1982:45).

Day-to-day battles and folk heroes are invoked as Gwala celebrates the importance of the everyday struggles:

> On the sidewalks of Goch Street
> We shall sit down and sing
> We shall sing songs that Tiro would have loved to hear
> Songs MaNgoyi would have sung
> Songs Mthuli kaShezi would have composed
> Songs
> Songs that lead us on (1982:46)

Freire and Macedo argue that the active participation of ordinary people is critical to the popular-democratic transformation of society:

> To shape history is to be present in it, not merely represented in it .... people must assume the task of remaking their society, remaking themselves in the process. Without assuming this greater task as well as the task of remaking themselves, the people will gradually stop participating in the making of their history (1987:65).

Contending histories arise to challenge the partial or incomplete truths of the dominant discourses, and counter their alienating rhetoric. Such developments occur at great psychological cost to people who are already deeply traumatised, as is clear in the historiographical concerns expressed in Serote's "Behold Mama, Flowers" (1978:60):

> you must know that one day the storm will hit me and i will fall
> and i will never ever be able to say it the way i should say it
> what i really know

This is in addition to the basic battles with the language of the dominant, that Kelwyn Sole addresses in "The Discourse of History" (1987a:111-112):

> In the beginning

was the word. I
struggle to take
that word, and
make of it my own

Hlatshwayo and Qabula performed "The Tears of a Creator" (1986:49-56) at the launch of COSATU in 1985. While they contextualise the rise of the union as being continuous with the history of workers' struggles they appropriate some of the icons of Afrikaner nationalism, suggesting the strength of the working classes' contribution to a new, confident and counterhegemonic phase:

Here is the workers'
Freedom train

It is made-up of old wagons
Repaired and patched-up ox-carts
Rolling on the road again
Back again
Revived!
Once capsized by Champion
The wagon - once derailed by Kadalie

Here it rolls ahead

It is not just the historical discourses of the dominant that had to be challenged, for other dominant discourses have been as problematic, as Serote suggests in a passage from "Behold Mama, Flowers" (1978:23):

how can we forget
luthuli's voice, sightless, it crashed into a train and died
how can we forget
sobukwe
like a distorted journey twisted into ways of death
and voices held hostage

According to the coroner's report at the inquest into the ANC leader Albert Lutuli's[3] death, he had been knocked down by a train. But Lutuli's family and neighbours have disputed this. Nokukhanya Lutuli was convinced that her husband's death was a concealed assassination. She maintained that Lutuli's injuries were not consistent with the supposed cause of death. Their neighbours, who saw Lutuli taking his customary path alongside the railway track to the fields, saw someone lean out of the passing train and strike the then blind Lutuli on the head with an iron bar (Lutuli, 1988). This explanation is consistent with the nature of his injuries. That this account regarding the death of the country's first Nobel Prize winner should be barely known three decades after his death is suggestive of the scale of silencing. Serote's emphasis on the voices of the dead leaders suggests that the significance and sacrifice of their lives, and even the manner of their deaths, speak to other oppressed people.

It is Albert Lutuli, among other deceased activists, who is summoned from his grave by Morena and by the "everyman" characters of Mbongeni and Percy in *Woza Albert!* (1983). As the title suggests, the play draws upon the Biblical myth of resurrection on the Day of Judgement to suggest that, despite the death and decimation of key activists, history is not irrevocable. *Asinamali!* (1985) makes a similar point in a different way, suggesting that the legacy of the Lamontville community leader, Msizi Dube, survives his liquidation. Through their organic connection with the communal struggles across the country, the histories of such individuals defy truncation.

Dikobe wa Mogale's poem "bantwini ngcipe's testament" (1984:48) reflects the influence of the oral tradition, in which the gap between the poet and the speaker is minimal. The poet-activist invokes the history of struggle as his personal history. However, the poet's vocation as an *Umkhonto we Sizwe* cadre confirms that the expression of identification is not just rhetorical but incantatory, as he ritually prepares himself for military action against the state:

> i come bloodstained from the Bhambata Rebellion,
> the Sharpeville Massacre
> the June 16th Massacre
> i come bloodstained from the machine gun diplomacy
> of the Matola and Maseru Massacre Raids
> where the bodies of men, women and children
> were draped with the scarlet bullet wounds
> sprouting roses of blood
> which fertilised a parched soil
> i come from Pretoria's Death Row

Sankie Nkondo celebrated guerilla action within the country in "Memories (dedicated to Comrades Sebepi, Ta Vic, and Dladla all the freedom frighters who died in the battlefield)" (1990:21-24), in terms that assert that revolutionary action is history-making:

> those who remain and survive the cloud
> that seeks to blur and exhaust the drill
> know that this liberation will have tale-tellers
> like those narrators of Sasol and Secunda
> the tappers of Pretoria and Goch Street[4]

While the listing of the sites of guerilla successes is an assertion of identification and solidarity, some poets have drawn upon that history to analyse, reflect upon and confront particular predicaments, as Serote does in "Time Has Run Out" (1982b:125-134). Using an intimate form of address to reinforce solidarity, the poem addresses the self-destructive behaviour of the oppressed, suggesting the necessity of facing up to history even when it has been less than salutary:

> remember
> the cruel things we did to each other where, mad we
> killed each other (1982b:131)

Recording the history of oppressed communities from the point of view of the oppressed majority is an act of culture that is central to the reconstruction of South African society. "Time Has Run Out" offers a construction of oppressed history that affirms and enacts the production of fragmented, silenced or unuttered texts:

> days came and went
> we built and build when we could, thoughts burnt into our memory
> by acts of struggle
> when then we stood faceless before this time
> knowing that once we were defeated and conquered
> knowing the act of rape called racism
> and the down trodding despair of being exploited
> it seemed then that we offered
> thousands and millions of silences
> as we toiled in the vast fields of our land and in the deep bottoms of it
> and in the factories
> one by one we consumed our youth and life and went
> here on this earth where plants and dogs grow
> for us life had become a risk
> remember (1982b:130-1)

Literature has served as an important instrument in the struggle, enabling the articulation of suppressed and violated subject positions. In the absence of documentation writers take on the task of reconstruction. Given the arbitrary and irrational basis of racial oppression, it was crucial that those skilled in dealing with the subjective, the poets, were responsive. Jane Watts has maintained that South African writers

> are doing more than creating a language, a style, new forms, substituting collectivism for individualism both intrinsically in the work and in the very act of composition. They are building up a discourse within which it is possible for ordinary people to discuss and understand their history, to recognise the mechanical structures of their oppression, to discover and take charge of their own identities in the face of all the forces working towards their alienation or even erasure (1989:253).

The validity of Watts' analysis is borne out by many poems, but perhaps most powerfully in Serote's "There will be a Better Time" (1982b:142-144). Asserting that in the construction of popular historical memory there is always a struggle with the dominant constructions, Serote demonstrates how attention to the processes of reception can disable the dominant:

> my little friend
> no more starts with learning to learn
> learn to carry the past
> like we do with dirty clothes
> carry them to the washing place and wash them
> we carry the past to the present
> and wash it by learning what it means

when what it means becomes our action
because we have learnt it (1982b:142)

While, signally, not a counter-narrative in the dominant mode[5], the poem is an unassuming affirmation of the ordinariness of being and belonging:

we are born here, so we are here (1982b:143)

A later passage affirms the long line of historical figures such as Makana, Shaka, Moshesh and Bambatha who also fought for autonomy:

we say like our warriors said
from a long time past
this is our land
we say
we will live like this is our land
we say
like our warriors said
and time knows them like we know them
no they said
and we say no!
yes there will be a better time because we say so
there will be a better time because like our warriors
we make a better time and many of us know that we can and must
there will be a better time
we say
time has run out for our bad time
we say we learnt from bad times to make time better (1982b:143-4)

The militant application of a sense of history is glimpsed in Duncan Matlho's poem "To the Millions Hungry" (Feinberg, 1980:108), which makes the following exhortation:

be one with the corn
the spirits of Nkandla

The traditional style of the invocation hides the militant reference to the forest in Natal that served as a base in the resistance against colonialism.

Sankie Nkondo's poem "The Bivouac" (1990:64-6) is unprecedented in South African resistance literature in English. An ANC activist in exile at the time the poem was composed, Nkondo's confidence in her historical identity is demonstrated through her speaker's highly idiosyncratic wielding of historical facts. Showing that all readings are limited by the subject position of writer and reader in the field of ideological struggle, Nkondo's semi-serious, semi-satirical text challenges the productive role of the reader:

It is good for them
to know who I am
I am Bambata on Cetswayo

related to Nghunghunyana
cousining Moshoeshoe
to converge on Isandhlwana
and bivouac at Voortrekkerhoogte
but the pigmentation hatchet men
insist that I am confused indeed
Vendaland by Ciskei is my home
the rest is forbidden ground
But I know who I am
I know and feel my roots
my mother sojourned at Ramabulana
my uncle is Ndebele
my father is my father
I am South Africa (1990:64)

Feminists' reservations regarding nationalism are alluded to in the last six lines (particularly in the dismissive nod at patriarchal identity), although the earlier lines recognise the significance of nationalism in anti-colonial struggle. Nkondo is alert to how histories, including alternative histories, tend to institutionalize specific subject positions (as eg., Black Consciousness reinforced not black people so much as black middle-class masculinity). She avoids securing a subject position that in turn marginalises other subject positions (Spivak, 1990:43). The speaker's "assertions, recoveries, and identifications, all of them quite literally grounded on [a] poetically projected base", as Said argues "are made possible by a sense of the land reappropriated by its people" (1993:273).

More recent referents also have their place in the construction of popular history. A sense of the history of the struggle is articulated in the play *Wathint'Abafazi, Wa'thint'Imbokotho* (You strike the women, you strike the rock), which celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the protest that involved 20 000 women marching to the Union Buildings to challenge the pass laws in August 1956. Like *Hamba Dompas* this play presents "a pastiche of broken families, an endless search for money, police raids and blockades, fear, anger and an overwhelming show of humanity" (*Weekly Mail*, 9.1.87:21).

Serote's "No More Strangers" (1982b:135-137) suggests that the toll of a history of struggle will not dissuade but produce the certainty that liberation will be achieved:

it is freedom, only freedom which can quench our thirst -
we did learn from terror that it is us who will seize history
our freedom

Because it is in the nature of the dominant power to destroy or distort the history of oppressed people, the struggle has involved the production and maintenance of independent records. This is acknowledged in Serote's "The Breezing Dawn of the New Day" (1982b:138-141), in the refrain "we keep the record here". The role of historian that the liberation poets assumed is one of the roles of the *izimbongi* in the oral tradition. However, Serote's poem discourages the passive inheritance of tradition. Instead cultural traditions are treated as a resource to advance the struggles for liberation. The colloquial passage deliberately contradicts the dominant style of record-keeping with its spare, terse

construction. The inclusive, confiding, and supportive tone offers further evidence of the poet's popular-democratic orientation. However, the inserted prose passages suggest that the task of the poet may be interrupted by that of the historian, for the poetic project is not remote from the demands of the liberation struggle.

> we keep the record:
> isandlwana. bulhoek. sharpeville. are milestones of which the latest is soweto; as most travellers know, people who walk the road do now and then come to junctions. if they know the road, they walk on without stop, if they don't they wait around and ask around until they find their way or the night comes or the daylight goes, which is to say, ah, how much do you know about yourself and where you are and where you are going to: blood river. cato manor. or another type of soweto? (138-9)

As expressions of popular culture, Serote's poems from the *Behold Mama, Flowers* collection (1978) onwards articulate how people make sense of their history, define their identity, understand their spirituality, deal with their development, and educate and entertain themselves as a community.

Another example of the reconstruction of unrecorded and contested versions of history as an act of integral community is Deelah Khan's poem "Black Monday" (Coetzee and Willemse, 1989:111), which is an impassioned response to the Trojan Horse incident in Athlone township:

> Tears cannot wash away the sorrow,
> Sorrow cannot strip the scars:
> those scars will scathe and scorch
> and record the time!

Popular memory increases "the capacity of subaltern classes and groups to rely on their past to produce a different future" (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1983:25). Popular art forms preserve communal memories by the use of memorable formulae. In societies that have battled against colonialism, popular memory has functioned to codify, preserve and transmit subaltern historical narratives. Popular memory also helps in the reconceptualization of the status quo, by mobilising collective knowledge of the past for reflection, analysis and action. By challenging the monopoly of the experts, whose interests tend to coincide with the dominant, popular culture represents the refusal of memory organised from above by dominant or inimical groups (Mattelart, 1983:21). For instance, *The Marabi Dance* by Modikwe Dikobe (1973) attempts to render the origins of black urban culture. The text recalls the vibrance of Johannesburg's slumyard communities before they were destroyed and contradicts much of the apartheid propaganda that was used to justify such acts of destruction.

Inspired as much by the oral tradition as by the singer Jonathan Butler's musical piece "The Guitar that talks", the journalist Kaiser Mabhilidi Nyatsumba's poem "A Poet Speaks" (1990:13) celebrates the role of the poet in the 1980s:

> I am an active recorder

of my people's distorted history
a surgeon of their souls,
spectacles for their impaired vision
a barometer of their suppressed anger
and a mirror of their suffering

More subtly, Ngema's *Asinamali!* (1985) is a substantive example of the use of literature to counter repression and forgetting. The play uses a petty thief, Bra Tony, as a foil to Msizi Dube, the Lamontville activist. The audience has to work through the admiration that the youthful Solomzi Bisholo expresses for the flamboyant and exploitative *tsotsi*, to recognise the enormity of the unsung Dube's contribution to his community. This is no laudatory representation of history: Dube is barely cited or referred to in the play. Instead it is Dube's activism that secures him a place in his community's memory, beyond any telling of it. Through such texts writers, dramatists and performers are "building up a discourse within which it is possible for ordinary people to discuss and understand their history" (Watts, 1989:253).

Serote's close attention to the history of the oppressed is most evident in the long poems *No Baby Must Weep* (1975) and "Behold Mama, Flowers" (1978:11-61), which involve the "leisurely, detailed and untrammeled exploration of his own community's consciousness" (Watts, 1989:196). The storyteller Gcina Mhlope puts another genre, the story, to the same use in her autobiographical play of the late 1980s, *Have you seen Zandile?* The power of Mhlope's performances suggest the force that poor, rural, black women have to develop in order to break out of the silencing that has been endured. Mhlope uses the story form and the stage to render voices that have been repressed.

A sophisticated sense of history as myth is conveyed in Oswald Mtshali's "Hector Petersen - the young martyr" (1980:29-30), which contends that despite the history of suffering, the destruction of the oppressor is inevitable:

the demise of the hallowed ideologies has begun,
the battering-ram of time and history is
pulverising the edifice of vaunted granite;
it creaks at the seams as it crumbles.

In his construction of history in literature Mtshali is self-consciously experimental (like Sankie Nkondo in "The Bivouac"), focusing on rhetoric and narrative in the process of text-making, as he suggests the constructed nature of all texts.

Laws such as the Prisons' Act and the Protection of Safety and Information Act made it impossible to report on apartheid prisons. In the tradition of such plays as *The Island* by Fugard, Kani and Ntshona, *Big Boys* by Charles Fourie and *Asinamali!* (1985) by Mbongeni Ngema, Mothobi Mutloatse composed a play set in a prison: *Lakutshon'ilanga*, which is a mixture of drama, poetry and music. Mutloatse uses the personal stories of prisoners to reconstruct part of South Africa's missing history.

History is not only about great people, nor is it about the written word alone, as the work of Luli Callinicos' attests (1987; 1989). Several "popular histories" were produced in the

1980s, about the working-class activists Petrus Tom, Jabu Ndlovu, Moses Mayekiso and Msizi Dube. Linked to these is Jeremy Cronin's poem "Walking on Air" (1983:5-14), which parodies the form of the chronicle to render the quiet heroism of a fellow political prisoner, John Matthews.

Some writers got their poems to stand in for records that, for ideological reasons, were either erased or never kept at all. Jeremy Cronin's patchwork of memory and silences, "Group Photo From Pretoria Local on the Occasion of a Fourth Anniversary (Never Taken)" (1983:21-2), deals with a series of defaults: a photograph that was never taken beside a fig tree that no longer exists because it had already been "chopped down in reprisal" (1983:21) by people upset at the defeat of the South African troops in Angola in 1975. Eschewing the seamless, monological fictions of master narratives Cronin's non-celebratory history acknowledges the gaps and problems in its structure. At the same time its discontinuities and ruptures hint at suppressed narratives.

Keith Gottschalk uses his rousing "Praise-poem of the United Democratic Front" (1986:23) to link the project of the political prisoners of the 1963 Rivonia trial with the projects of the mass democratic movement activists of the 1980s. The medium of the poem is well suited to the challenges of time. This is a deliberately unheroic history of the anonymous and exhausted activists upon whom the making of a free country depended. Patently not the protagonists of the standard histories, the activists had no identity, address or personal life, aside from their identity as comrades:

> Our comrades are a million men and women.
>
> For twenty-three years they have lived
> entombed in stone.
> They converse with silence
> and the chains that shackle them
> shackle thirty million of us.
>
> They walk through the furnace,
> they measure distance by army roadblocks,
> and time by section *twenty-nine*.
>
> their names: comrade organiser
> comrade delegate
> comrade rank and file.
> their address: a suitcase
> between here and there,
> a secret cell
> and the catacombs of silence.
> their meals: tension and cigarettes
> their personal lives: the interstices of committees and agenda
> their love-making: under matters arising
> their destiny: death - and our liberation...
> Our comrades travel door upon door,
> defying fear and fatigue;

arguing, explaining,
strengthening people,
building organisation

Gottschalk's poem bears out Karin Barber's argument that

> History... was also made by the collective or aggregate struggles, actions and reactions of the obscure majority of African people. Their experiences are history in their own right as well as making the official history of the leaders intelligible (1987:3).

Political and cultural domination involves the negation of the historical processes of the dominated society. As a result, the construction of popular memory is, reflexively, an attempt to remember what is being erased, as Keorapetse Kgositsile's "Mayibuye iAfrika" (Couzens, 1982:388-9) suggests:

the sharp-edge
birth of retrieved root
nimble as dream
translated memory rides
past and future alike

Cabral emphasized the necessity for the establishment of new historical coordinates. Only effective political action can define the trajectory of the movement against oppression, as well as ensuring continuity (Mattelart and Siegelaub,1979:211). In "Time Has Run Out" (1982b:125-134) Serote asserts the dialectic that is inextricably a part of the keeping of historical record:

we design our day
and the day designs us (Serote, 1982b:128)

It is evident that Serote proceeds from Cabral's view that

> the masses are the torch-bearers of culture; they are the source of culture and at the same time, the one entity truly capable of preserving and creating it - of *making history*" (Mattelart and Siegelaub, 1979:207).

By positing history as an instrument of change, Serote alerts his audience to its transformative possibilities. Therefore, despite the odds, in "There will be a better time" (1982b:142-144) Serote expresses an implicit optimism about the future:

and from the dark of the past we create a better time
bright like a brand new day
a day we make
a better time
ah
there *will* be a better time made by us (1982b:144)

Such confidence arises from a sense of the social purpose of history, which does not only involve thinking or writing about it. It also means being actively involved in its construction, particularly at a critical juncture.

A great deal of resistance literature attests to the view that the "past is an oppression from which we can rescue ourselves only by political choices" (Frow, 1986:230). Serote's poem "When Lights Go Out" (1978:69-70) challenges deterministic views of the history of the oppressed. Instead, with revolutionary optimism, it asserts that the future of this society cannot be gauged from its difficult history:

> even everything written in blood
> says nothing about how we could wake up
> tomorrow and build a day

Notes

1. Refer, for example, to Christie (1985).

2. The *amasi* bird of children's lore was the source of food (*maas* refers to soured milk, a popular and nutritious staple).

3. The surname of Albert Lutuli is spelt without an "h".

4. These were the targets of the ANC guerillas.

5. The poem differs from the narratives of the glorious past and the sense of organic unity with the African soil that Mazisi Kunene and Ingoapele Madingoane constructed to inspire South Africans.

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